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Thesis

AN INTRODUCTION TO HENRY JAMES

by

Mary Carroll O'Connell

(A.B., Boston University, 1946)

submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
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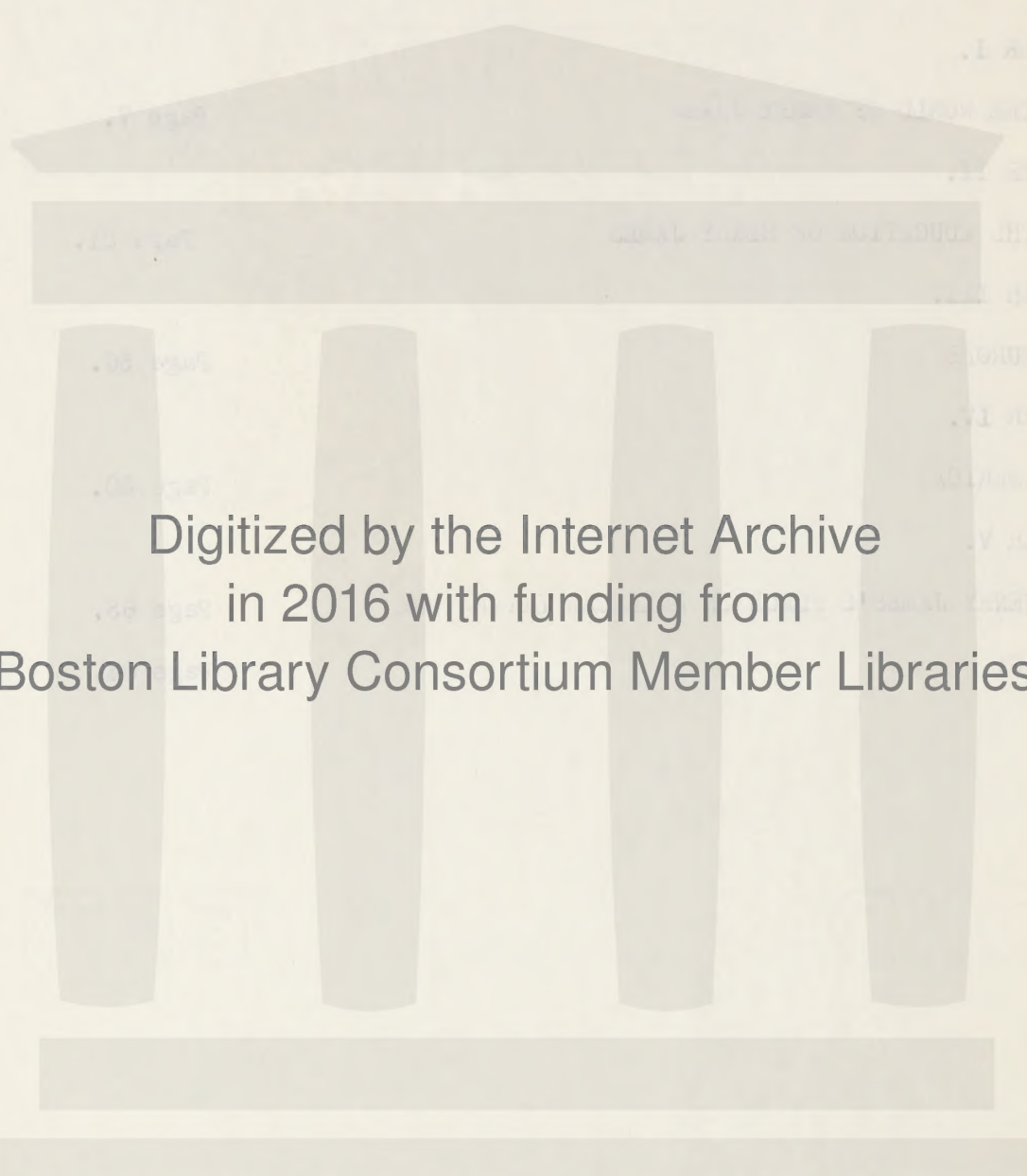




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## INTRODUCTION

What more can be added to the already ponderous mass of material on Henry James?

LeRoy Phillips's fine bibliography, published in 1930, is no longer complete. The extensive bibliography compiled by the editors of the Outline-History of American Literature, which contains more than a hundred references to scholarly bibliographies, biographies and critical estimates of James, is not exhaustive. It omits, for example, F.O. Matthiessen's recent valuable publications, The Note-Books of Henry James and The James Family. Many of these works were written by such authors, scholars and critics as Edmund Gosse, Ezra Pound, Joseph Conrad, Edith Wharton, Rebecca West, William Auden, Brander Matthews, Carl Van Doren and Frank Swinnerton.

Most of them treated special phases of James's work: Joseph Warren Beach, in 1918, described The Method of Henry James, including in his appraisal Idea, Picture, Revelation, Suspense, Point of View, Dialogue, Drama, Eliminations, Tone, Romance, and Ethics; Cornelia Pulsifer Kelley wrote The Early Development of Henry James in 1930, which covered his work up to The Portrait of a Lady, and Matthiessen's The Major Phase discussed his last great works, The





Ambassadors, The Wings of the Dove, The Golden Bowl, and the fourth unfinished volume, The Ivory Tower; Stephen Spender's The Destructive Element in 1935 was written to interpret James to the modern reader; Edmund Wilson and Yvor Winters explored his obscurity and ambiguity through the eyes of the psychologist and moralist; Edel Leon wrote of The Exile of Henry James in 1932; and E.L. Forbes wrote A Study of the Effect of Henry James's Theatrical Experience on His Later Novels. There have been several short critical essays written as prefaces to his novels or short stories, in anthologies or collections, by Philip Rahv, Clifton Fadiman and Edward Weeks.

Yet there has never been a definitive biography of Henry James. Percy Lubbock spoke truly when he said in his introduction to The Letters of Henry James:

"When Henry James wrote the reminiscences of his youth he shewed conclusively, what indeed could be doubtful to none who knew him, that it would be impossible for anyone else to write his life."

When he proceeds in the face of these formidable words, the would-be biographer of James is virtually asking to be called presumptuous and conceited. There are obvious difficulties in writing such a life as his. James was not a man of action, but a man of thought. Neither was he a colorful personality--anecdotes did not naturally grow up about him. He had no great romance, performed no feats of valor. During the greater part of his life he was not even a successful author. His development as a great man is mental, observable in his writings, but not apparent in the external facts of his life.

It is true that Van Wyck Brooks, besides treating James in re-





lation to his contemporaries in The Flowering of New England and New England Indian Summer, has attempted in The Pilgrimage of Henry James to write a sort of mental biography, including a superficial glimpse of the events of his life. While his volume is readable and clever, his view of James as a talented author who mistakenly, almost pathetically, abandoned the proper source of his subject matter when he made the decision to live in Europe, and who lost sight of human values in his absorption with style (during the period which Matthiessen considers his greatest), colors his narrative so that one must go to some less prejudiced critic to counteract this partial view.

James himself, in his prefaces to the New York Edition of his works (later collected and edited by R. P. Blackmur in The Art of the Novel in 1934), his masterly essay, The Art of Fiction, his two autobiographies, A Small Boy and Others and Notes of a Son and Brother, which cover his life from 1843 to 1869, and the two-volume edition of his letters, edited by Percy Lubbock, has given us a history of his life and theories of art.

However, what casual reader of a James novel, to increase his understanding, appreciation and, above all, pure enjoyment of the book, will go to these sources of enlightenment? They are frequently difficult to obtain and time-consuming, and the average reader is rarely interested enough to investigate them. Yet, for one who reads for pleasure, not because he is studying the history of the novel or must write a research paper or is of a scholarly, probing turn of mind, some background of this sort is necessary if he is to





derive complete satisfaction of the work. Otherwise, it may seem dull, obscure, ambiguous. The reader becomes exasperated with what he considers the tortuous method of expression, the apparent evasions, the use of indirection, the absorption with the seemingly trivial subtleties of life and thought.

James's detractors have been many and vociferous. Even while admitting his genius (as in the case of Van Wyck Brooks) they claim that "he, and hence his work, is rootless."\* They insist that his subject matter is limited and subordinated to his form, that he was a snob, that he shrank from honest passion, that his style obscures his meaning. I have heard it remarked that James could use three pages to describe the lift of an eyebrow. B. V. Crawford, who contributed the article on James in the Outline-History of American Literature, describes his deficiencies thus:

"His orderly, sheltered, celibate, monotonously blameless life had denied him enriching experiences. His almost complete ignorance of business; still worse, his lack of any understanding of the perpetual and ruthless struggle for mere existence which absorbs the attention of a large part of the human race; his chilliness in the treatment of the sex passion; these are qualifications of his claim to supreme rank as a fiction writer."

Clifton Fadiman replies to this ancient dogma that "an artist must suffer to be great" in his introduction to his collection of James's short stories when he says:

"Nothing happened to him except everything, everything that he could observe, relate, weigh, judge. These discriminations produced

\* The Short Stories of Henry James: selected and edited by Clifton Fadiman. Random House. Introduction, p.xi.





an incalculable amount of life, an entire population of human beings, a world of connections. And they were continually subjected to control, to a proper and harmonious ordering. Experience assumes meaning when the proper form for its expression is found--and only then. Thus the life of Henry James became identical with the search for and the discovery of the proper form. It became a work of art...From the point of view of the typical hero of our time, the success-monger, James hardly lived at all. From another point of view, he lived a life so full, so passionate, so aware, that in comparison the careers of the success-men seem anemic and withered." \*

James was not familiar with business, with the struggle for existence, it is true; but he did not even attempt to deal with the workaday world, so how does this lack affect his writing? Theodore Dreiser did not write of the international situation; does this fact limit his stature as a novelist? If we are to criticise an author, we must accept his "starting point;" if we are not willing to do this, we must in fairness leave him alone. Neither did he dwell on brutality, violence, or elemental emotion; but if these are requisites of great literature, let us turn from James to Erskine Caldwell, John Steinbeck, or Ernest Hemingway.

If one deplores his choice of scene and expatriation, one would make him other than he is; to deprive him of his setting is to deprive him of his uniqueness. He defended his subject matter by explaining that he was free to choose no other "experience from which ideas and themes and suggestions spring: this proves ever what it has had to be, this is one with the very turn one's life has taken; so that whatever it 'gives,' whatever it makes us feel and think of,

\* Ibid. Introduction, pp. ix--x.





we regard very much as imposed and inevitable. The subject thus pressed upon the artist is the necessity of his case and the fruit of his consciousness; which truth has ever made of any quarrel with his subject, any stupid attempt to go behind that, the true stultification of criticism."

James had an enormous influence upon the world of letters, and the critical appreciation he has today is not new; nevertheless, his public popularity has always been limited. Only Daisy Miller and The Portrait of a Lady won him applause in his own time, and even today he is not as widely read as he deserves. This may be because most of us are remote from the type of world he depicted; we are prone to like what is familiar to us. More probably it is because James is considered "difficult;" he demands that we read him attentively, that we concentrate upon what he has to say. James's critics, by their emphasis on his superbly artistic style, his expert craftsmanship, inadvertently turn us away with the feeling that we shall not find a good "story," or interesting characters, or dramatic situations, which make a novel entertaining. But all these James can give us, and more, if we are willing to appreciate sympathetically his habit of mind.

The purpose of this thesis is, by discussing the times in which he lived, his family background and cosmopolitan education, his place in literature and personal artistic method, to provide an introduction to Henry James which will help the reader to approach James in a receptive frame of mind, and assist him to find the personal meaning which James can have for every individual.





## CHAPTER I.

## THE WORLD OF HENRY JAMES \*

In 1843 John C. Calhoun, Secretary of State to John Tyler, was negotiating a treaty for the annexation of Texas. In the same year, "Fifty-four forty or fight!" resounded from the northernmost border of the Oregon territory. Immigrants from England, Ireland, and Germany were pouring into the East, while a steady stream of migrants flocked westward, although it was to be five years before gold was discovered in California. The country was expanding, yet simultaneously contracting, for steamboats, canals and railroads drew it together, and in 1843 the first practicable telegraph line was constructed. The McCormick reaper was beginning to be manufactured in small quantities, coffee was becoming the national drink, and accurate likenesses of many of the citizenry were being recorded for posterity in daguerrotypes. In 1843 Nathaniel Parker Willis became editor of the New Mirror, and Fourier's Phalanxes were springing up all over the nation. Coal was replacing wood as a fuel, the rocking chair was becoming popular, bells were appearing on urban doors, taking the place of knockers. 1843 was a year of invention, of change, of growth, and into it was born, on April 15, Henry James, Jr.

\*For the historical facts in this chapter I am indebted to the works by Beard, Boas & Burton, Fish, Krout and Nevins, cited in bibliography.





When we look back upon another generation, particularities merge into a generalized picture with certain outstanding characteristics. Minute daily happenings, localized habits, new patents, minor technical improvements, current customs, fashions, prevailing ideas, are gathered, sifted, channeled into "trends," analyzed, and sometimes colored by time, until a well-defined portrait of an era emerges. And the finished picture, viewed in a clear light from a little distance, is probably accurate, although necessarily partial.

In such a picture, the figure of the younger Henry James is an anomaly. He was both ahead of his time and behind it. He was too big for his country--the United States of the 19th Century--and simultaneously too small for it. Yet it was probably because of this paradox that he was able to make his unique contribution to his age.

What were those outstanding characteristics of the world of Henry James? What were the foremost trends, the vital events? In particular, what do we need to know of those years to better understand the James works?

A brief backward glance shows us at once the great physical fact of the century: the Civil War. But the cataclysmic conflict between the states need not be rehearsed here, for the twenty-year-old Henry, because of a still-mysterious injury to his leg which prevented his direct participation, experienced it only vicariously, through his brothers Wilky and Robertson.





The far-reaching results of the war--the westward expansion, the industrial boom, the rapid growth of transportation facilities, the increase in population, the amassing of huge fortunes almost overnight--these too are apparent to a cursory glance behind us. Yet James was detached from them--they had their effect upon him, but it was a negative one, as we shall see later.

Did he, then live totally apart from the world about him, isolated in an ivory tower? And if he was merely a disinterested bystander, why would an appreciation of his surroundings lead to an appreciation of his novels? The answer is that his was not an inactive life, for he felt that "...One way of taking life was to go in for everything and everyone, which kept you abundantly occupied, and the other way was to be as occupied, quite as occupied, just with the sense and image of it all, and on only a fifth of the actual immersion: a circumstance extremely strange."\* A vicarious experience to James was as real and strongly felt as an actual one; perhaps more so. His active imagination, his keen sensitivity made him perceive and realize far more than the ordinary man; he not only saw a circumstance straight-on, he looked beneath and above it and on all sides of it. I have heard it said that

\*Henry James: A Small Boy and Others. New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913. p. 290





we are only free when we are imprisoned; when we are deprived of freedom of action, of the necessity of making our own day-to-day decisions, we are released to make full use of the powers of the mind. In this sense James' poor health freed him; by limiting his physical experience, it enlarged his mental activity, which was incredibly acute.

It was not the great, the challenging events of the century which attracted his sharp attention, however, but their reaction upon the people he knew. And the people he knew were not the people Mark Twain, or Bret Harte, or Edward Eggleston knew. They were not miners, or steamboat captains, or pioneers, or frontiersmen. Neither were they members of the haute monde of the time, the newly prominent Goulds, Astors, or Vanderbilts. His friends were the men of literature, the educators, the statesmen--William Dean Howells and Charles Eliot Norton and James Russell Lowell. But if his world brushed another, it was that of the nouveaux riches--those who had made their fortunes during the post-war prosperity and were now seeking education and culture wherever they could find it. Frequently they found it abroad, and there formed what, for our purposes, might be called a unique class--The American Tourist.

They were an arrogant group, untutored in the way of art, of music or literature, confident and proud of their great country, their money and themselves, yet sensing somehow a lack in the very things from which they derived the most satisfaction: they seemed





they seemed bold, and were shy; they seemed assured, and were naive; they bragged, and secretly admired. They sought culture, not knowing exactly what it might consist of, but sensing that it was somehow involved with the antiquities of the civilization across the sea. Van Wyck Brooks said that "...James felt.. uneasy, as everyone is bound to feel who cannot believe that his country possesses a standard. He may have felt that Americans were morally better than Europeans, but in other respects he felt that his country was 'negative'..."\* It is doubtful if his fellow travelers fully realized their need for a standard, and if they had they would have been too inarticulate or embarrassed to express it, but it is certain that they did feel uneasy, for the search continued.

What, then, did this progressive, exciting, optimistic land lack that decadent, conservative, fatigued old Europe had?

Surely, we were more moral than they. The chaperon still existed, but our women were more free because our men were more chivalrous. Americans married young, worked hard and were true to their mates. Churchgoing was universally observed, and theatres did not open their doors on the Sabbath. But these industrious, democratic people lacked manners. In the year of James' birth, tobacco-chewing and spitting were

\*New England: Indian Summer; Van Wyck Brooks; E.P.Dutton & Co., Inc., 1940; p.147.





widely practiced, the knife was a far more popular implement than the fork, and food was consumed quickly and silently. Dining was a necessary business, enjoyed for its own sake, not as a social function. Gentlemen and ladies bathed once weekly, and dirty linen was not uncommon on the most prosperous of men. But what they lacked, sartorially, their wives supplied doubly, for the urban American woman was the most overdressed in the world. The debutante of 1843 (if such existed) was indistinguishable from her shop-girl cousin as they passed one another on the street, for each was dressed in the height of London or Paris fashion. They met at one of the numerous Lyceum lectures on equally gaudy terms, and neither minded, for here was American democracy. There was no so-called aristocracy except such as the old Knickerbockers or Bostonians claimed, no titled gentry. Snobbism hardly existed.

But with the growth of cities, and the simultaneous growth of individual wealth, such conditions do not long obtain. A "Society" must inevitably develop. And in such a country as this was, where only the Indians could claim native descent for more than a very few generations, that "society" had necessarily to be based on wealth. It was acquired, not inherited wealth, and in most cases suddenly acquired. And, like a child's new toy, it was displayed. The more the new wealth was in evidence, the higher the new social position.

So the rich began to build mansions. Howells's





Silas Lapham, so typical of the new man of property, said to Corey: "Yes, sir, give an architect money enough, and he'll give you a nice house every time." The beautiful, functional simplicity of the Colonial home began to be replaced by the architectural artificialities of the old world--the Greek, the Gothic, the ornate Italian--sometimes all three at once. The tycoons vied with one another for elaborate structures, and American taste grew resultingly worse, until in the 1870's such artistic monstrosities as Jay Cooke's 72-room "Ogontz," Bayard Taylor's Italian villa, and F.E.Church's astounding Persian-type palace on the Hudson were typical of rich men's residences. The interiors were not less decorated: colorfully patterned carpets competed with richly-hued wallpapers; lavish glass chandeliers hung from high ceilings; lampshades were fringed; sofas and chairs were tufted plush or satin; porcelain figurines and what-nots were imported in quantities; wood-work was intricately carved; artificial flowers stood under glass domes. Even the poor followed the fashion, for building costs were low, and thousands of "gingerbread" houses appeared, looking like so many monstrous wedding cakes. England's Victorian age was in full flower; and uncertain Americans slavishly aped her modes.





The artistic situation was not less deplorable than that of architecture. There were no more Benjamin Wests, J.S.Copleys, or Gilbert Stuarts, and at the time of James' birth the popular painters were the portraitists, although the new daguerreotypes were supplanting them in popularity. But these painters, as well as the few outstanding landscape artists of the "Hudson River School," were forced either to teach themselves or journey to Europe for their training. And when they returned, they found no critical authority to judge their work; popular acceptance had to be their goal, and since the reign of Andrew Jackson, it was the consensus that one man's opinion was as good as another's. As a result, their work was frequently sentimental and "pretty". People liked pictures which "told a story," and illustrations of the Scriptures were popular. Copies of Emanuel Leutze's "Columbus Before the Council of Salamanca" were sold by the thousands in 1841. And until after the Civil War there was not a respectable art gallery in the country.

An encouraging sign, however, was the growing demand for European painting and sculpture. August Belmont, A.T. Stewart and William T. Blodgett were paying tremendous sums for accredited foreign works. Travels through French, English and Italian galleries brought many to the realization that here was beauty--and a sound investment--to be had. And over a period of time we were beginning to develop a native talent





of our own, partly fostered by the two schools of art then extant, Philadelphia's Academy of Fine Arts and New York's National Academy of Design which had been established in 1828. Winslow Homer became the foremost military artist of the country; George Inness and William Morris Hunt were becoming internationally famous. James McNeill Whistler, like John La Farge, John Singer Sargent, Mary Cassatt and so many others, was studying abroad. In 1875 Charles Eliot Norton occupied the newly created chair of art at Harvard, and the following year the Museum of Fine Arts opened in Boston, preceded seven years earlier by the Corcoran Art Gallery in Washington. Even William James was studying for a career as an artist.

In 1843 the theatre was still held in disrepute. The strict morality inherited from the Colonial period did not permit the well-bred of the time to enter this profession without loss of reputation. However, stock companies were beginning to earn substantial sums in the cities, and stars from Europe, particularly England, found that they could enlarge their fortunes and renown by touring the United States. Their plays, too, were imported, for there was little playwriting in America, except in the field of comedy, which was slapstick and frequently vulgar. Oh, there were a few romantic verse tragedies and comedies--"The Broker of Bogata" by Robert Montgomery Bird, was played by Edwin Forrest for thirty years, and James W. Wallack played "Tortesa the Usurer" for several





years after its introduction in 1832. Plays dealing with the aspirations of American social climbers had a vogue--"Nature's Nobleman" in 1851, Mrs. Bateman's "Self," E. G. Wilkins' "Young New York," Cornelius Matthers' "False Pretenses, or Both Sides of Good Society" in 1856, and notably Anna Cora Mowatt Ritchie's "Fashion" in 1850 were popular with the very people they satirized. But the classics were most in evidence, and Shakespeare was relatively more popular in the Great White Way than he is today. The American plays which were modeled on classic examples were liked, and romantic plays were frequently laid in far-off countries, as George Henry Boker's "Francesca da Rimini." Audiences liked to watch stars, even then, and Edwin Forrest was the greatest. Charlotte Cushman was a leading actress, and six years after Henry's birth the famous Edwin Booth appeared at the Boston Museum. Shortly thereafter the dramatization of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" brought the theatre new prestige. Singers and dancers were drawing crowds to theatres, too--in 1843 the Viennese dancer, Fanny Elssler, had just concluded a successful three years in this country, and in 1850 P. T. Barnum brought lovely Jenny Lind to the American concert hall.

It was after the war that the theatre really boomed. Such names as Modjeska, Joseph Jefferson and Mary Anderson illuminated theatrical placards. The drama was becoming more realistic, as was the typically American literature of the





time. Mark Twain's "The Gilded Age" was dramatized in 1874, in 1875 W. J. Florence starred in Wolf's "The Almighty Dollar," and Bronson Howard and Dion Boucicault were contributing a peculiarly American form of drama. Boucicault both wrote and acted in "The Octoroon," which dealt with the problem of slavery in 1859. He also dramatized a few outstanding English novels, "The Cricket on the Hearth," "Nicholas Nickleby," "The Heart of Midlothian." Steele MacKaye, who had also, incidentally, studied art under William Hunt, brought a new naturalness and simplicity to acting in his domestic drama of the late seventies, "Hazel Kirke," and founded and conducted four schools of acting, notably the Lyceum Theatre School in New York in 1884. Joseph Jefferson's "Rip Van Winkle" was the greatest hit of all. The "star system" was developing almost to the exclusion of the old stock companies, although Wallack's in New York and Mrs. John Drew's in Philadelphia still flourished. Young John Drew was rising to fame, and the Drew-Barrymore dynasty began.

Although American culture was chiefly in the hands of women, the current magazines and newspapers (except for Godey's Lady's Book) were designed for the masculine population, stimulated by Hoe's revolutionary rotary press in 1846. In 1841 Horace Greeley had founded the Tribune, and the Sun, the Herald and the Times were widely read early in the century. The North American Review, founded as early as 1815, was long



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the best magazine in the country. The Transcendentalist organ, The Dial, existed from 1840 to 1844. The Atlantic Monthly appeared in 1857, and Harper's Magazine in 1850. In the seventies the Popular Science Monthly brought new developments in the field to the masses. Religion and thrilling stories were blended in Hearth and Home at about the same time. Periodicals, indeed, supplied most of the literature of the time to the vast majority of Americans.

Ours was not a reading public, and perhaps this state can be attributed to the educational facilities of the time. Public primary education was required in only two states at the time of James' birth--Massachusetts and New York, although this was the period of Horace Mann's pioneering in the field of secondary education. The well-to-do usually sent their children to private schools, or hired tutors. Although higher learning could be found in the East, at Harvard, Yale, Dartmouth, or Brown, it was usually desirable to go abroad for a well-rounded training. Professional education was almost entirely acquired by apprenticeship. Medical and law schools, where they existed, were ill-equipped and ill-staffed, but training for the ministry could be had at any of several denominational colleges.

After the war great strides were abruptly made in the field of education. Six great college presidents appeared on the scene: White of Cornell(1867); James McCosh of





of Princeton (1868); Noah Porter of Yale (1871); James B. Angell of Michigan (1871); Daniel Coit Gilman of the new Johns Hopkins (1876); and Charles W. Eliot of Harvard (1869). Previously college courses had been exactly prescribed--Greek, Latin, a little Hebrew and science, and theology were the basis of the curriculum. Now the elective system was adopted; by 1875 seniors at Harvard had only one prescribed course and juniors only three. The Harvard Law School, under C. C. Langdell (1869) developed the "case method" of studying law, instead of forcing students to memorize legal principles by rote, and the period of study was extended beyond the one-year minimum. New courses were inaugurated--languages and sciences became popular. The facilities of medical schools were tremendously enlarged.

In the West, education was re-created by the Morrill Act of 1862, and coeducation was not uncommon in land-grant colleges. And pervading the teaching of youth throughout the nation was a theory expressed in a volume published in 1859, but not seriously considered until the turmoil of war had ceased, the "Origin of the Species," by Charles Darwin. It was to have a greater effect on the literature and science of the age than any of the currently publicized events--even the war itself.

Henry James had been born into a changing world. From his birth until the publication of his Portrait of a Lady in 1882, his country had been trying to grow up. The newly





rich were thronging into Pike's Opera House and the classical concerts of Theodore Thomas. They were building brown-stone houses on Fifth Avenue and watching the Parisian ballet at Niblo's Theatre. They were shopping at the huge department stores of A.T.Stewart, John Wanamaker and R.H.Macy, with their new plate-glass windows. They frequented the "concert-saloons" called the Louvre and the Olympic, while their brothers flocked to their Chatham Street and Bowery counterparts, and stopped at one of the thousands of rathskellers on the way home. The new society hurried to Newport or Saratoga in the summer, and those who remained spent their holidays at Coney Island. The bustle replaced the hoop, and steel replaced wrought iron in building construction. Men now wore ready-made clothes, and the first trans-Atlantic cable was laid. Wine was served only on ceremonial occasions, though Pabst, Best and Schlitz made profits in Milwaukee. Ulysses S. Grant was inaugurated as the 18th President, and in the same year the first professional baseball team was formed. The telephone and typewriter were invented in the United States; and Henry James sailed for England.





## CHAPTER II.

## THE EDUCATION OF HENRY JAMES

In 1906 Henry James wrote to William James's daughter Margaret:

"Your poor old uncle groans with shame when he bethinks himself of the scant and miserable education, and educative opportunity, he had (compared with) his magnificent modern niece. No one took any interest whatever in his development, except to neglect or snub it where it might have helped--and any that he was ever to have he picked up wholly by himself." \*

Seeing these words detached from context, knowing nothing of the James family, the reader might infer that their author was another illustration of the Horatio Alger story--the traditional American saga of the rise of the ambitious boy from rags to riches, from obscurity to fame. He might picture him reading a book (for which he had walked miles through a blinding blizzard) by the feeble light of a flickering candle, fearful only of the tread of his father's footsteps. He might see him courageous in the face of opposition, stalwart despite the protests of ignorant and indifferent parents, struggling valiantly onward in his quest for knowledge and renown. For it is that sort of battle with adversity which the words imply--a dogged search for learning, ultimately and triumphantly successful.

\* The Letters of Henry James: edited by Percy Lubbock. New York, Charles Scribner's Sons. 1920. Volume II, page 54.





Such an inference is , of course, exaggerated and absurd, but hardly more so than the implication in James's own words. Too, it points up by contrast the beginnings of the James career--for he was, indeed, the reverse of the Horatio Alger hero. He never knew material privation, nor suffered from lack of family sympathy. Why, then, this apparently petulant reference to his "scant and miserable education"?

We must, I think, believe that he meant his formal schooling, which was varied and haphazard; no sooner were he and William established in one school than they were moved to another. Their liberal and indulgent father seemed to want to give them as broad a scholastic education as possible, so broad that no particular phase of it was able to take root in the minds of the impressionable youths. As a result, however, instead of being only superficially educated, Henry's imagination was fostered by his ever-changing environment; he was at liberty virtually to educate himself, to "dawdle and gape"\* at will, to store up an abundance of impressions, to develop precocious discrimination.

This extremely unmethodical and inconsistent course of instruction was part of his father's plan to permit his very "educable"<sup>1.</sup> sons to derive their own values from it; he cared only that they acquire virtue, and care more for the human than the literal, the material aspects of life; virtue was to him infinitely more valuable than "success," a word he never mentioned to his children. He con-

\* Henry James: A Small Boy and Others. New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913. p. 25.

1. Ibid. p. 217.





sidered that the purpose of education, by which he meant the aggregate of every contact, impression, and experience they should have, was to instill goodness, and not a particular art or craft. His father did not, it is true, take "any interest whatever in his development," if that word implies a growth into a standard pattern, a set mold; and thus mere attendance at school played a relatively small part in the education of Henry James.

The process began, as it does with most children, at home. Most children, however, are not born into such a home as his; and the difference was the nature of the James family, "...such a company of characters and such a picture of differences, and withal so fused and united and interlocked..."\*

Henry James the elder was of Irish descent, his father, William James, having come to New York from County Cavan shortly after the Revolutionary War. It was he who founded the fortune which enabled his many descendants to live, "never guilty of a stroke of business." 1. His mother's grandfather, Hugh Walsh, had come from County Down in 1764, and another ancestor had arrived at about the same time from Scotland. Only his father's mother, Catherine Barber, was of English blood, and her family had lived in America for two generations.

His father, though never formally ordained as a minister, was a man of God. He was motivated by an ideal, in the words of William, of "the true relation between mankind and its Creator." 2. Although

\*Op. cit. p. 2

1. Ibid. p.190

2. Quoted by Lubbock: The Letters of Henry James. p.3.





his own thinking and writing were original and unconventional, as a philosopher he was primarily a disciple of Swedenborg. Despite the admiration with which his ideas and publications were met, they never achieved widespread popularity; indeed, even his second son did not understand his writings as well as did William, whose mind was more akin to his father's. Their intellectual differences, however, did not affect the devotion--nor, more importantly, the understanding--between them, and when Henry wrote of his father there was as much affection as reverence in his words.

The elder James did not hold himself aloof from his children; indeed, he was unusually close to them. He took them about, told them stories--stories that pointed a moral principle, perhaps, but one so subtly woven into the anecdote that he did not seem to preach. They visited friends together, Henry shy and still by his father's side, seldom speaking, always listening. Occasionally they strolled along Fifth Avenue together (his father's walks were limited through an injury received in boyhood which caused him to lose a leg; an injury which paralleled a less-serious one received by Henry before the Civil War, in that they both occurred in fires), always pausing to examine the brilliantly-colored theatrical posters at the corner of Ninth Street. They attended Mr. Barnum's "lecture-room" at the Great American Museum, where the circus-like posters disavowed the solemn title of the exhibition. They haunted favorite bookstores, eagerly rummaging through new piles of magazines and books from England, slowly browsing among the familiar shelves. And most exciting





of all, there was the theatre. During his early youth, and later in Paris, this was Henry's greatest joy, and his father and mother, also interested in the drama, fortunately felt that what was good enough for them was good enough for their children. So the whole family attended frequently, and the little boy was as much at home amidst the lights of Broadway as is the average child in the family kitchen. Henry could hardly remember an incident in his childhood which was not closely associated with the presence of his father, and he cherished his memories of him as those of a trusted friend, and protector, rather than as an austere and respected man of letters.

His father's deeply-felt philosophy could not help pervading the atmosphere of the James home. He despised self-satisfied Christianity, conscious propriety, what he termed "flagrant morality,"\*more than anything else. He had a fine faith in his fellow man, a faith which was never shaken, simply because it always worked ( or perhaps it always worked because it was never shaken). Above all he cared for the "spiritual decency" of his children; he sought to teach them a reverence for truth, which is one and unchanging and dependable, and scorn for facts, which are many and vacillating. He permitted them almost unlimited freedom--even their church-going was unregulated. Although they frequently attended Trinity Church on the Sabbath, the children were free to visit any place of worship in the city of New York, or none at all. What Henry terms their "pewless state"<sup>1.</sup> was,

\*James: A Small Boy and Others. p. 68.

1. Ibid., p. 234





if anything, a source of embarrassment to him; if he had religious instruction in abundance from his father, he still sought information as to where they "went"; to which that wise man replied that "there was no communion, even that of the Catholics, even that of the Jews, even that of the Swedenborgians, from which we need find ourselves excluded." \* Henry's religious education was, then, like his worldly schooling, calculated by his father to give him the utmost breadth of choice; a liberty which, however, was controlled by the far-seeing parent's confidence in the conscience of his son--a trust which the boy never violated.

Henry James, Sr., was surely the dominating force in the home which was the source and foundation of the education of Henry James, Jr. But what of Mary, his wife, of whom Henry wrote so little--and yet, in a few words, so much? In an era when Lucretia Mott, Margaret Fuller and Elizabeth Cady Stanton were leading their sex in a war to abolish political and economic discrimination against them (the first Woman's Rights Convention was held in New York five years after Henry's birth), Mary James was singularly detached from the controversy. Although better-educated than the majority of her contemporaries, and removed from the necessity of earning her living, she was not uninterested in the campaign because of selfishness or indolence. It was simply that she lived in and for her family, and the idea of actively participating in a political issue, of militantly championing a cause, probably never occurred to her. Creating and maintaining

\* Op. cit., p. 234.





a well-ordered, harmonious household was to her of more importance than winning the ballot; she knew her vocation, and fulfilled it. What need had she of emancipation? What need to assert her "individuality"? She had submerged hers in her husband's when she became his wife, and given of her personality to each of her four children. Yet her absolute selflessness and devotion to her husband and children was an active quality; one upon which they all depended. She seemed to draw her life from the group about her, and in turn they rested upon the quiet support of her presence and self-effacing service with all of their weight. Her children could talk freely to her, and she met them on their own level. Her husband could read her his "papers," and draw encouragement from her intelligent, understanding listening. When she died in 1882, however, her husband accepted his loss with remarkable equanimity, as proof of the efficacy of his philosophy; but within a few months his lack of interest in living became apparent, when he consciously refused to continue without his wife. It was as if half of him had died with her, and now he, himself, permitted the other half to die, too.

The younger children, Alice, Robertson and Wilkinson, could not be said to have played an active part in the education of their brother Henry, although during his youth he lived largely in the outgoing experiences of the good-natured Wilky, as he was to do later when he was unable to follow him to war. Although Wilky lacked the genius which characterized his elder brothers, he possessed a talent which Henry envied--an amiability, a genial charm, which won him many



a well-organized, harmonious household with its own traditions, ideas  
and the mother, who was not a mother, was a mother in the sense that

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friends. He was anxious to share these friends with his family, a generosity appreciated particularly by Henry, who was unable to grasp life and companionship with the eagerness and directness of his brother. During their youth Wilkinson, only a little younger than Henry, was closer to him than any of the James children, even William.

Henry conceived of the latter as a superior being, who held a position in his childhood world which he could never attain. He wrote of him that, "...he had gained such an advance of me in his sixteen months' experience of the world before mine began that I never for all the time of childhood and youth in the least caught up with him or overtook him. He was always round the corner and out of sight, coming back into view but at his hours of extremest ease. We were never in the same schoolroom, in the same game, scarce even in step together or in the same phase at the same time; when our phases overlapped, that is, it was only for a moment--he was clean out before

I had got well in."\* The mutual esteem which brought the brothers close together did not come until later years, and the death of William in 1910 was one of the hardest blows Henry had to bear.

This, then, was the "company of characters" which peopled the scene of his youth--and if he did not reflect upon his immediate family as the Dramatis Personae, surely he looked upon the world about him as a vast setting for the drama of life. His appetite for the theatre--or rather the drama, as a form--was nearly insatiable; and he was able, from his earliest years, to find, or create, this "form"

\*Op. cit., p. 9





wherever he went. Thus he enjoyed going to church, not because he had a mystical nature, but from "the love of the exhibition in general, thanks to which figures, faces, furniture, sounds, smells and colours became....a positive little orgy of the senses and riot of the mind":\* he enjoyed hotel summers, for he said, "...there, incomparably, was the chance to dawdle and gape; there were human appearances in endless variety and on the exhibition stage of a piazza that my gape measured almost as by miles; that the social scene so peopled would  
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pretty well always say more to me than anything else";\*he enjoyed "just to be somewhere--almost anywhere would do--and somehow receive an impression or an accession, feel a relation or a vibration. He was to go without many things, ever so many--as all persons do in whom contemplation takes so much the place of action; but everywhere, in the years that came soon after, and that in fact continued long, in the streets of great towns, in New York still for some time, and then for a while in London, in Paris, in Geneva, wherever it might be, he was to enjoy more than anything the so far from showy practice of wondering and dawdling and gaping; he was really, I think, much to  
2.  
profit by it."

Was ever a little boy more aware? Did ever a child see more, feel more, remember more of his surroundings? How, then, could Henry James have been given greater "educative opportunity" than the free-

\* Op. cit., p. 235.

1. Ibid., p.31

2. Ibid., p.25





dom to wander at will through "the streets of great towns," where he received so many of those peculiarly urban impressions which were to reappear in his writings? One might almost consider his classroom studies interruptions in the vaster educational process; and what a variety of interruptions there were !

His earliest years were governed by a succession of instructresses. There was the plump Miss Daly, with her ruddy complexion, who rewarded her pupils with thick slices of bread and jam, and Miss Rogers with her shining black curls, tall and thin in her genteel blue dress. There were Miss Sedgwick and Mrs. Wright and the foreign ladies, the large woman with sidebraids from Siberia, and the delicate Mlle. Delavigne, who represented France.

There was the Institution Vergnès, with its solidly "black" interior, the French school where one studied the languages with the children of the fashionable New York families, and the little, black-haired Cubans and Mexicans. And there was Mr. Richard Jenks's select resort for young gentlemen, which meant liberation from the constant embarrassment of tutelage by women. Both of these schools were located on Broadway, and the brothers James took that sophisticated thoroughfare for granted with the unconscious aplomb of men of the world. Mr. Jenks's school was followed, in the winter of 1854-1855 by the establishment of the Messrs. Forest and Quackenboss, which resembled a shop and which considered its pupils assets in a firm.

Perhaps it was the businesslike atmosphere of the latter school





which led the elder Henry James to put into effect a decision which he must have long considered, a decision which was to have a tremendous effect on the life of his second son. A "sensuous education" was to him of far more importance than an entirely "practical" one, and more and more he came to believe that the former could not be found in the United States. Therefore in 1855 the family removed to Europe, to investigate at first hand the famed benefits of the schools in Switzerland.

It was odd, then, in view of his parents' desire to educate his "senses," that Henry was sent to an École Préparatoire aux Écoles Spéciales, which was the Zurich Polytechnic School. Here he found himself studying mathematics and the sciences among future mining and civil engineers, boys whose talents and abilities were so far different from his own that he felt himself humbled and embarrassed. His experience here at the Institution Rochette, before he was finally freed to join William at the Academy, was a period of anguish. He was unable to approach a geometric problem without actual terror; physics and algebra were, and were to remain to him, unfathomable mysteries. Awed, he watched his schoolmates approach the menacing blackboard with confidence, manipulate the maze of arcs and angles and numerals with accuracy, and return unconcernedly to their seats as if they had not accomplished what was, to him, a spectacular feat of intelligence and insight. If he was able to follow their reasoning as they worked their problems before his eyes, when his own turn came his helplessness returned, and the symbols and lines and numbers





became mysterious markings whose meaning eluded him. He began to feel almost guilty, as if he ought somehow to be other than he was, more like these mathematically-minded schoolfellows whose example he could not, try as he would, emulate. He tried terribly, but his temperament prevented his competing with the others. He could not say, "Well, if they can, I can too," and suit the action to the words. Competition, and its companion, Envy, were alike impossible to him; jealousy seemed a sort of "spiritual snatching," of which he was incapable. So he struggled with science, and failed, and at last was permitted to abandon it. But despite those dreary and discouraging months, he was able to write later:

"And yet I bore it afterwards no malice--resorting again to that early fatalistic philosophy of which the general sense was that almost anything, however disagreeable, had been worth while; so unable was I to claim that it hadn't involved impressions." \*

He was happier at the Academy with William, where the atmosphere was more congenial to his tastes and abilities. The world of French literature was opened to him by a M. Toeppfer; Cicero and, more pleasantly, Virgil, were explored; he met the works of Schiller and the great Goethe. He was free to attend whatever lectures he preferred, and used his freedom with precocious discrimination. But most significantly his parents, possibly to atone for his recent imprisonment in the dungeon of science, allowed him to roam at will, exploring the Swiss city, devouring the feast of Genevan atmosphere. Most of

\* Henry James: Notes of a Son and Brother. New York. Charles Scribner's Sons. 1914. p. 5.





all he was impressed by the "scale and solidity" of the ancient villas, including the house in which the Jameses lived--they seemed vast and heavy and old and above all "deep," so deep that everything he had previously known seemed shallow by comparison. The tremendous depth and age of the houses began to symbolize his developing feeling about Europe itself--a sense of reverence and awe which he was still too young to crystallize into realization.

During his seventeenth year, Henry, again with William, studied at Bonn-am-Rhein, but Germany failed to stimulate him as had Paris and Geneva. Perhaps it failed to give him the measure of Old World culture he had sought and found elsewhere on the continent; or possibly he had his first, almost unconscious, sense of the eternal German he portrayed, nineteen years later, in A Bundle of Letters. At any rate, he was vaguely uncomfortable, even distrustful, at Bonn-am-Rhein, and did not regret the brevity of his term there.

In 1860 the family returned to America, and during the ensuing year at Newport where William studied art under William Hunt and John La Farge, the idea of what he wanted to do at last began to take definite form in Henry's mind. He often spent what he called "hours of art" in Hunt's studio, and the subtle glimmering of a desire became a "flagrant, unattenuated aim."<sup>1</sup>\* The time he spent in La Farge's rooms helped to confirm his new purpose, for in him he saw the perfect serenity which comes of having a fast hold on truth--truth,

\* James: A Small Boy and Others. p. 269

1. James: Notes of a Son and Brother. p.81.





to the artist, being the security of having what he called "the supreme artistic." \* La Farge seemed to him to have unassailable intellectual and spiritual strength; and an integrity, a sense of right which he never for a moment relinquished. It was this absolute serenity which appeared to Henry to be the hallmark of the genuine artist; and it was for this he began to strive.

But with the formation of his ambition, Henry met the first parental opposition he had so far encountered, and on startlingly unorthodox grounds. So opposed was his father to "success," in and for itself; so anxious was he that his sons should be, above all, spiritually free and fine, that he considered the career of art as narrowing, in its way, as commerce, business and industry. He made no other suggestions; he merely fought the possibility of limitations of any kind being placed upon his sons.

So in the year 1862-1863 Henry, without formal preparation, was enrolled at the Harvard Law School, where, as before, he felt himself a "singularly alien member" <sup>1.</sup> of his class. Here, as everywhere, he felt that William, who had abandoned art for science, was far in advance of him, and the thought contributed to his loneliness. Never a gregarious person, he had only three or four friends among his classmates, and knew the rest only by name and reputation. His view and remembrance of the Cambridge scene was a generalized one;

\* Henry James: Notes of a Son and Brother, p. 100.

1. Ibid., p. 120.





what individual portraits he retained were parts of the whole impression, not singularly significant. The most vivid of these was that of Professor F. J. Childs, head of the English department. Professor Childs, humanist and humorist, was to him the personification of the best of America (but the youth, already infected with the "European virus," still hungered for the Old World he had left more than two years before). The "New England colour" of the scene, the College library with its "sparse bristle of aspiring granite," the morning lectures at Dane Hall, the frequent theatre-trips to Boston, the ivied brick, the atmosphere of already-hallowed tradition, the hours of writing (on the hard sofa in his rooms in Winthrop Square), remained at least as clearly in his memory as the personalities of his dimly-seen companions, so many of them to die soon in the Civil War.

The end of his year at Harvard marked the end of the formal education of Henry James. What practical knowledge he had acquired had been subordinated to the "sensuous education" his father had desired--"the aggregate of every contact, impression and experience" he should have. Later he was to realize his father's wisdom.

\* Op. cit., p. 346





## CHAPTER III.

## EUROPE

Henry James's earliest conscious remembrance was of Europe. He was only two when his parents took him abroad for the first time, yet several years later he astonished them by recalling "a great stately square, surrounded with high-roofed houses and having in its centre a tall and glorious column."<sup>1</sup>

The New York or Albany of the mid-nineteenth century did not offer such a sight as this; the view, which he remembered framed by a carriage window, must have been the Place and the Colonne Vendôme. Thus early did Henry James awake to a perception of Paris, his first "sense of Europe."<sup>2</sup>

Mlle. Delavigne first represented to him "personal France."<sup>3</sup> She was one of a procession of governesses who tutored the young brothers, William and Henry. She was young and gay, and so lightly did she step that she seemed to be walking on cloth-soled shoes. Her eyes shone when she smiled, and she was, to Henry, a model for a Gavarni sketch come to life. Instead of scolding, she laughed, and the small breaches of discipline which the other instructresses punished were a source of amusement to her. She seemed not to have learned

1. Op. cit., James, A Small Boy and Others, p. 53.

2. Ibid., p. 34.

3. Ibid., p. 19.





that life was a sombre and serious affair, and the little boys loved her for it.

It was in the summer of 1854 that Henry met young Louis de Coppet.<sup>1.</sup> Louis, "naturally and incorruptibly French," emphasized that "sense of Europe" which had first taken root on the Rue de Castiglione, leading to the Place Vendôme. (It was Louis who first imputed to his eleven-year-old companion the ability to write, when he invited his collaboration on a romance--a project which was never fulfilled.) Louis, straight from a school on the lake of Geneva, possessed the polished manners of European children, which were in striking contrast with those of the pupils of Mr. Jenks's select resort for young gentlemen.<sup>2.</sup> What if he pronounced "Iowa" "Ee-o-wah"? So it had been pronounced by the Jesuit Fathers who named it; Louis was right, and we, really, wrong. Louis's companionship, that summer, was exciting to Henry. "It was as if there had been a mild magic in that breath, however, scant, of another world..."<sup>3.</sup>

English names, too, English places, English books--these too were more real to his childish senses and intellect than those of his own country. London and Piccadilly and the Green Park, Windsor and Richmond and Sudbrook held a charm for his attentive ears that New York and Albany, Fort Hamilton and New Brighton could never have. The magazines from England--The Charm, for instance--even smelled different

1. Ibid., p. 33.

2. p. 33.

3. p. 36.





from American ones. The odor seemed to convey an "atmosphere"---his atmosphere, he was beginning to feel.

One day he stood just outside the partly-open door of his father's study, where he could hear the voices of the two men within. Through the crack he could see a table, piled high with his father's "papers," a volume of Swedenborg, a copy of the North American Review, and beside it, in the easy chair, the profile of a man, a great stout man, his white hair like a cloud in the afternoon sunlight. The little boy pressed his ear close to the door, thrilling to the sound of the visitor's voice, absorbing not only the tone, but the English inflection of the words. Perhaps he moved the door a fraction, for suddenly the huge man turned in his chair and glimpsed the hovering child, clad in a tight-fitting jacket, brass-buttoned from the neck, with a starched white collar.

"Come in, little boy, and show me your extraordinary jacket !"

Henry shook with shyness, but he felt compelled to enter. As he approached the guest, his timidity was not abated by the friendly hand the great man laid on his shoulder. Uncomfortably he raised his eyes to those of his inquisitor.

"And is this the common uniform of boys of your age and class?"

The nervous child, now acutely self-conscious, murmured a response, and the man chuckled.

"Were you to go to England, you know, you would be addressed as 'Buttons.'"





The little boy smiled feebly and glanced at his father, who, appreciating his son's discomfiture, dismissed him with a nod, and Henry<sup>1.</sup> fled from the room.

The white-haired visitor was William Makepeace Thackeray. It was Henry's first meeting with the celebrated author who, with Dickens, had already begun to form his literary taste. He knew their England--the England of Phiz and Cruikshank and Mr. Pickwick and Pendennis and Punch--far better than he knew the America of Rip Van Winkle or Deer-slayer or Diedrich Knickerbocker. And now, at the age of eleven, he had met Thackeray and been made to feel "somehow queer." Later, he was to understand the visitor's amusement.

Henry was influenced, too, by his father's attitude toward the "solutional Europe." In 1849, Henry James Sr. had written to Emerson:

"These things look expensive and temporary to me, besides being an additional care; and so, considering with much pity our four stout boys, who have no play-room within doors and import shocking bad manners from the street, we gravely ponder whether it wouldn't be better to go abroad for a few years with them, allowing them to absorb French and German and get such a sensuous education as they can't get here." 2.

In 1855 the James family moved to Europe for a visit of three years. For the first time since his babyhood, Henry rode through the London streets in the box of a carriage. But now, as he watched the passing scene, it was as if he were watching the pages of Dickens come to life. Unremembered, it was yet astonishingly familiar. And how he drank it in! As he wrote in later years, "There are London aspects

1. Incident adapted from James: A Small Boy and Others. pp. 87-88.

2. Op. cit. James: Notes of a Son and Brother. p. 195.





which, so far as they still touch me, after all the years, touch me as just sensible reminders of this hour of early apprehension, so penetrated for me as to have kept its ineffaceable stamp. For at last  
1.  
we had come to Europe..."

And Paris ! It was a few days later that the little boy stood on a balcony overlooking the Rue de la Paix. Perhaps his brothers and sister were with him--Henry was only conscious of the star-filled summer sky above and Paris below. His absorption of the scene was an active physical process; he was eating, he was drinking, he was feeling and breathing "the whole perfect Parisianism I seemed to myself always to have possessed mentally...and that now filled out its frame or case for me from every lighted window, up and down, as if each of these had been, for strength of sense, a word in some immortal quotation, the very breath of civilised lips." 2. It was so right, so exactly as he had conceived it to be. He wanted to cry out to his family, to anyone who could hear, to himself, "I told you so ! I told you so !" 2.

There were castles, and provincial country inns, ruins and old villas; there was a woman laboring in the fields, dressed in a black bodice, a white shirt and a red petticoat--a "peasant in sabots"; 3.  
there were the Louvre and Luxembourg; there was France, and it was all that it had been in dreams. And then the "incomparable Switzerland," 4.

1. Op. cit., James: A Small Boy and Others, p. 276
2. Ibid., p. 280
3. Ibid., p. 284
4. Ibid., p. 292





the long, glistening miles of snow, the emerald valleys, the blue of sky and lake; Switzerland before the huge hotels, the hordes of tourists, of the time when American, English, Russian and German met in Geneva in friendliness and spoke each other's tongues. Then London for the winter, early Victorian London, and the Tower and Madame Tussaud's and St. Paul's and the Abbey and the Zoological Gardens. It was a "world of costume,"<sup>1.</sup> where the postmen wore military-red coats; milkwomen carried pails swinging from their shoulders on wooden yokes; footmen, carrying staves, rode behind the carriages of the rich. Cruikshank's sketches came to life, but so did Hogarth's, in the filth and poverty of the back streets.

The Jameses virtually commuted between London and Paris during those three years, the years in which Henry caught, irrevocably, inevitably, the "European virus," a germ of which he could never rid himself. What a succession of impressions were crowded into his sensitive mind during that sojourn in the old world! The process of "taking in" never stopped, the "accumulating" within his mind of the myriad pictures his senses took. Some were merely fragments, but so richly colored were they that they formed a kaleidoscopic portrait of his romantic world.

Listen to one of the images he portrays; here is old Paris re-incarnated:

1. Ibid., p. 309.





"What association could have breathed more from the queer graces and queer incommodities alike, from the diffused glassy polish of floor and perilous staircase, from the redundancy of mirror and clock and ormolu vase, from the irrepressibility of the white and gold panel, from that merciless elegance of tense red damask, above all, which made the gilt-framed backs of sofa and chair as sumptuous, no doubt, but as sumptuously stiff, as the brocaded walls?" 1.

And of the region of the Champs-Élysées:

"The splendid avenue...carried the eye from the Tuileries to the Arch, but pleasant old places abutted on it by the way, gardens and terraces and hôtels of another time, pavilions still braver than ours, cabarets and cafés of homely, almost dusty ruralism, spreading away to the River and the Wood. What was the Jardin d'Hiver, a place of entertainment standing quite over against us and that looped itself at night with little colored oil-lamps, a mere twinkling grin upon the face of pleasure?" 2.

And there were briefer glimpses; the public holiday of the Prince's baptism at Notre Dame, the fete of Saint-Napoléon (later described in Zola's Eugène Rougon), the walks along the Champs-Élysées, to the left bank and the Rue de Seine--walks which had a mystic futurity about them, a promise that here, not in America, lay the destiny of Henry James. The streets, the air, the very buildings seemed to speak to him; he walked along the Rue de Tournon and stopped before the Palace, listening to its message;

"Yes, small staring jeune homme, we are dignity and memory and measure, not to mention strong sense, too: for all of which good things take us--you won't find one of them when you find (as you're going to begin to at such a rate) vulgarity." 3.

There were the Cafe Foyot, the "elegant" Tuileries, the woodcuts of Gavarni and Grandville, of Henri-Monnier, the Paris museum of contemporary art. And there were the Palais Royal, "the very Paris

1. Ibid., p. 327

2. Ibid., p. 331

3. Ibid., p. 338





1.  
of Paris," and the public playbills of the theatres of the boulevard.

After a year in Newport, the Jameses returned to Geneva for the winter of 1859-1860. At the age of sixteen, after his brief, unpleasant experience at the Institution Rochette, he entered the Academy, where he followed a literary course which was more to his liking than the scientific curricula he had just left. He was able to wander at will through the Genevan streets, exploring the beautiful city. "The queer crooked silent corners behind cathedrals wrought in their way for one, did something, while one haunted them, to the imagination and the taste..."  
2.

After a year at Bonn, where Henry's imagination was quickened by a taste of German, and the literature of Goethe and Heine (although not nearly as much so as it was to be ten years later, when he first crossed the Alps into his beloved Italy), it was decided to return to America, in order that William might study art under the distinguished William Hunt.

The first part of the dreaded return trip took the brothers through Strasbourg, where they chanced to share a carriage with a pair of footmen and a lady's maid, moving for the September season to Homburg or Baden-Baden with the entourage of a pretty young marquise. The marquise seemed to him an example of "happy privilege at the highest pitch,"  
3.  
and to "exhale from afar...the scented air of the Tuileries." However, William and Henry listened to the unending chatter of the ser-

1. Ibid., p. 382.

2. Op. cit., James: Notes of a Son and Brother, p. 7

3. Ibid., p.55





vants with amazement; so these were the props which sustained the so-called "great" houses. Without vulgarity, then, there could be no nobility: cheapness must accompany greatness. This glimpse of the merry, cared-for aristocrat, and her shrill, chattering maid, the latter so necessary to the prestige of the former, made Henry realize for the first time that the reigning society of Europe, which he had unconsciously taken for granted, was not the idealized nobility he had imagined. The decadence of the upper strata was becoming apparent to him. Yet the very contrasts presented here were so different from the relative homogeneity of New York, of America; did not the very complexity of the order offer fertile ground for the imagination?

It was in Newport, the residence of Hunt, that the James family elected to settle. Newport seemed to be the only, the inevitably right place for the newly-repatriated group. It was a haven for those who were afflicted with the quality of detachment, the "effect of detachment" being "the fact of the experience of Europe."<sup>1</sup> Although there was absolutely no remedy which could permanently cure Henry, the possibilities of "hibernation" which Newport offered were a balm to the helplessly disconnected family.

During the ensuing nine years, when Henry was at Harvard Law School and later working with Howells on The Atlantic Monthly, his idea of a possible return to Europe was ever growing. In 1868, the journey to Europe "ceased to look positively and aggressively impossible."<sup>2</sup> Three months later he landed in Liverpool for a year's

1. Ibid., p.67

2. Op. cit., The Letters of Henry James; Vol. I. Quoted in Preface, p.11.





stay on the continent, a year which again whetted his appetite for the old world. Upon his return to the United States he developed the "wish,<sup>1.</sup> the absolute sense of need, to see Italy again." He wrote that "It's a complex fate, being an American, and one of the responsibilities<sup>2.</sup> it entails is fighting against a superstitious valuation of Europe." Perhaps his own valuation was not a superstitious one, but by 1874 it had conquered his doubts concerning whether or not his duty was to remain in America. The sixth sense of Henry James, his sense of Europe, predominated, and Europe became his home.

Upon his return to London in 1869, the city ceased to have the story-book aspect for him that it had had during his adolescence, but its charm was hardly diminished. A few days after his arrival he felt<sup>3.</sup> as if he had lived a year in the "murky metropolis," so permanent had been the impressions of his youth. He felt suddenly comfortable and at home, as he had never felt in Boston or even New York. He wanted to "plant his restless feet into the rich old soil and absorb<sup>4.</sup> the burden of the misty air." Eight years later this feeling of "belonging" had not lessened. And yet he had formed few friendships, only superficial acquaintances. He considered that, with his American and European background, he had become cosmopolitan, and to be cosmopolitan was to be alone. His position in the city which had become his home was chiefly that of

1. Ibid., p. 12.

2. Ibid., p. 13.

3. Ibid., Letter to Alice James., p. 15

4. Ibid., Letter to his mother, p. 20.





of observer, and indeed at first he observed much. But as the years passed by he felt that his acute faculties of perception were becoming dulled by the increasing familiarity of the place. He met a German one day (in 1869) who said:

"Oh, I know nothing of the English. I have lived here too long--twenty years. The first year I really knew a great deal, but I have lost it!" 1.

Henry James felt that the German had expressed his state of mind. Or perhaps he only liked to think of himself that completely acclimated; actually, he was inveterately American, and was to remain so, whether he chose to or not--the "saturation" had not taken place. He was never a thoroughly naturalized Briton, although at times he claimed to be.

He did, however, know his England thoroughly enough so that he quite lost his earlier romantic view of it. He felt, as his years increased, that he must "continue to do, or half-do, England in fiction." 2. It was certainly the place he knew best, perhaps because he remained, in spite of himself, an outsider. He wrote that as America receded farther from his mind, England grew clearer. Too, he had been treated more cordially by the English, and for several years had failed in his own country. By 1904, his life in England, at Lamb House, had been deliberately dull. Reading took the place of experience, and he cherished his peaceful hours at home in his library. He thought of the country of his choice as "this wonderful little attaching old

1. Ibid., Letter to Grace Norton, 1879; p. 69

2. Ibid., Letter to Howells, 1890; p. 166





England,"<sup>1.</sup> and it was there that he always returned with a sigh of comfort and relief.

When Henry James decided to make his permanent home in Europe in 1875, his first intention had been to settle in Paris. It was here that he had expected to find the literary life which would be most stimulating, with which he would have the strongest affinity. Consequently he took rooms at 29 Rue de Luxembourg, believing that he was at last on the threshold of a career in "glittering, charming, civilized Paris." This illusion was soon shattered. Despite his acquaintance with the literary giants of the country, Zola, de Maupassant, the de Goncourts, Flaubert, Alphonse Daudet and particularly the great Turgenieff, he soon began to feel that it was not here that the American could "saturate" himself with the atmosphere of the old world. Current French thought was not congenial to his; it seemed to exclude outside influence, to be sufficient unto itself. The writing of these men, these arch-naturalists, soon palled on James; he was even then selective, discriminating, absorbed with style. He did feel at first that he had "struck roots in the Parisian soil...it is a very comfortable and profitable place, on the whole...especially on its general and cosmopolitan side."<sup>2.</sup> But in 1876 he was, once and for all, settled in England, having become thoroughly satiated with the Frenchmen he had formerly admired. He considered the hierarchy of French authors "finished, besotted mandarins, and their Paris... their celestial Empire."<sup>3.</sup>

1. Ibid., Vol.II. Letter to Mrs. John L. Gardner, 1911, p. 196

2. Ibid., Letter to Howells, 1876 (Vol.I)

3. Ibid., Letter to William James, 1889, p. 155





It was Italy, alone, whose charm never diminished for him. When he was twenty-six, he received from Rome the same beautifully romantic impression that Paris had given him when he was a child of eleven, but, perhaps because he never really lived there, that impression was never altered. He wrote, upon his first visit to the Eternal City;

"At last--for the first time--I live !For the first time, I know what the picturesque is...even if I should leave Rome tonight, I should feel that I have caught the keynote of its operation on the senses." 1.

He had seen the Coliseum, the Pantheon, the Forum, Saint Peter's, the Castle of Saint Angelo--piazzas and ruins and monuments. He had seen His Holiness driving through the streets in "prodigious purple state," 2. and the Tiber, and the Column of Trajan. It was ancient history and romance and beauty and civilization, it was "the old enchantment of Rome, (which) steals over you and possesses you." 3. He had for Italy "an unspeakably tender passion," 4. and said of it that "its infinite charm and interest are one of the things in life to be most relied upon." 5. He visited the country almost every year, and its magic never failed him. Venice, Siena, Florence--they had an elusive atmosphere, and an exquisite charm which New York, Boston, London, even Paris could never approximate. When he was there he never wanted to leave, but the Italian air was too attenuated to live and work upon. It seemed to revive him, however, when he became so acclimated to England that he felt the need of escaping. And Italy provided the perfect refuge--

1. Ibid., Letter to William James, 1869, p. 24.

2. Ibid., Letter to William James, 1869, p. 25

3. Ibid., Letter to Grace Norton, 1877, p. 57

4. Ibid., Letter to John Addington Symonds, 1884, p. 106

5. Ibid., Letter to Grace Norton, 1887, p. 126.





it seemed to be only here that he could recapture his youthful ability to assimilate those glowing, richly colored impressions which fed his aesthetic sensitivity. As the years passed his affection centered more upon Venice than Rome, as it changed less. It seemed divine to him, the region of the Canal Grande a paradise. Rome and Florence, by 1907, had become, to him, vulgarized, but Venice became by contrast ever more lovable. He could be quiet there, as at Lamb House, and the "Parisian high pitch, haute elegance, general glittering life and conversation; the strain of keeping up with it all and mingling in the fray..."<sup>1</sup> seemed tedious and exhausting. The country remained<sup>2</sup> to him, until the end of his life, his "loved Italy."

But in 1903, Henry James wrote:

"Europe has ceased to be romantic to me, and my own country, in the evening of my days, has become so..."<sup>3</sup>

1. Ibid., Vol. II. Letter to Edward Lee Childe, 1908, p. 121
2. Ibid., Vol. I. Letter to Madame Paul Bourget, 1903, p. 410
3. Ibid., Same letter, p. 411.





## CHAPTER IV

### AMERICA

America had not been romantic to Henry James as a child. His first recollections of his own country were of the "simple freshness...its pure breath, at our infantile Albany."<sup>1</sup> Infantile. Was he speaking of his own infancy, or that of the city? Later, he was to conceive the land of his birth to have been, at that time, indeed young and unformed. How different, that conception, from "glittering, charming, civilised Paris."

He remembered New York: the family home on 14th Street; the smell of "cold dusty paint and iron at the rails of the Eighteenth Street corner;"<sup>2</sup> walking down Broadway from Union Square to Barnum's American Museum; the Clarendon Hotel, typical of the New York of other days; the brownstone houses between Fifth and Sixth Avenues. He remembered the old University Building in Washington Square, "throbbing with more offices and functions, a denser chiaroscuro, than any reared hugeness of today;" exhibitions of pictures on Broadway; the office of the "tremendously respectable dentist,"<sup>3</sup> with its

1. A Small Boy and Others, Henry James, p.4

2. Ibid., p.25

3. Ibid., p.63



## CHAPTER IV

## AMERICA

America had not been romantic to Henry James as a child. His first recollections of his own country were of the "slapdash freshness... its pure breath, at our infantile Albany."<sup>1</sup> Was he speaking of his own infancy, or that of the city? Later, he was to conceive the land of his birth to have been, at that time, indeed young and unformed. How different, that conception, from "glittering, charming, civilized Paris."<sup>2</sup> He remembered New York: the family home on Fifth Street; the smell of "cold dusty paint and iron at the rails" of the High Street corner;<sup>3</sup> walking down Broadway from Union Square to Barrow's American Museum; the Grand Hotel, typical of the New York of other days; the Brownstone houses between Fifth and Sixth Avenues. He remembered the old University Building in Washington Square, "throbbed with more offices and functions, a denser excitement, than any needed here of today;" exhibitions of pictures on Broadway; the office of the "preeminently respectable dentist," with its

1. A Small Boy and Others, Henry James, p. 5.

2. Ibid., p. 23.

3. Ibid., p. 63.

back-issues of Godey's Ladies Book on Warren Street; the taste of the accessible peaches in the Albany garden. Were these impressions to charm the imagination of Henry James?

And yet such an imagination as his could find romance, he knew not how, in the "queer empty dusty smelly New York of midsummer...the rank and rubbishy waterside quarters, where big loose cobbles, for the least of all the base items, lay wrenched from their sockets of pungent black mud and where the dependent streets managed by a law of their own to be all corners and the corners to be all groceries; groceries indeed largely of the 'green' order, so far as greenness could persist in the torrid air, and that bristle, in glorious defiance of traffic, with the overflow of their wares and implements. Carts and barrows and boxes and baskets, sprawling or stacked, familiarly elbowed in its course the bumping hack...while the situation was accepted by the loose citizen in the garb of a freeman save for the brass star on his breast--and the New York barb of the period was...an immense attestation of liberty."

Perhaps it was because "the squalor was a squalor wonderfully mixed and seasoned...the whole impression...that of some vast succulent cornucopia. What did the stacked boxes and baskets represent but the boundless fruitage of that more bucolic age of the American world..."<sup>1</sup>.

1. Ibid., p.69-70





But America was still, to James, "bucolic." And he was an urban child, at ease as he roamed Broadway, unfamiliar with the less-populated areas of his country. The great West was to him more foreign than Europe, and had he known it, vast stretches of prairie could hardly have had for him the appeal of crowded London streets. The unexplored, uncultivated wealth of his native land held no lure for him--his was not the spirit of the pioneer. He sought, rather, civilization--civilization in its most perfected form--and that was not to be found in the United States. Atmosphere was, to him, the breath of life, but it was the atmosphere of the Old World, not the New which stimulated him: not the Rockies, but the Alps; not the waters of the Mississippi, but the Seine; not the acres of Middle-Western wheat, but cultivated gardens in Versailles.

The westward expansion after the Civil War had no effect on the lives of the James family, who were, by the Autumn of 1865, settled in Boston. Henry had come in the autumn of '62 to attend the Harvard Law School, and now his family joined the eldest sons. So many of their friends--the Emersons, the Lowells, the Nortons--composed the inner circle of New England's giants, that the Jameses were at once absorbed into that "seated and rooted social order" of which Boston was more expressive at the time than any other American city.





Of far more importance than his academic pursuits at Harvard were his over-all impressions of the old New England scene he found there--the Norton woods in the orange and scarlet of Fall, the "vague golden November and the thick suggestion of the room where nascent 'thought' had again and again piped or wailed"<sup>1</sup>. remained always in his memory. "It was as if one's sense of 'Europe' sufficiently sure of itself to risk the strategic retreat, had backed away on tiptoe just to see how the sense of what was there facing one would manage without it..."<sup>2</sup>. As he viewed his surroundings, always observing, always detached, aloof from them as if they were a painting seen through glass, he was conscious of the "American" scene before him; as if he were on foreign soil, and were saying to himself, "This, then, is America." His classmates merely peopled the scenes; rules of composition required their presence, as their presence required a background. He was "with all intensity taking in New England,"<sup>3</sup>. absorbing it with all his senses. So he looked, and felt, and let his imagination color what he saw, and remembered. He was for the first time in "presence of matters normally, entirely, consistently American,"<sup>4</sup>. and New England was becoming much more

1. Notes of a Son & Brother, Henry James., p. 331

2. Ibid., p. 331

3. Ibid., p. 350

4. Ibid., p. 303





than a name. Cosmopolitan Newport had not been as wholly American as Cambridge. New York, rapidly becoming to the United States what London was to England and Paris, to France, was still not as consciously "American" as Boston. The latter city nearly satisfied his urban personality: it seemed to him to be uniquely urban and uniquely rural at the same time; a city of history, a town of contrasts. "There was in the exhibition at its best distinctly a savour--an excellent thing for a community to have, and part of the savour was...the breath of the fields and woods and waters, though at their domesticated and familiarised stage, or the echo of a tone which had somehow become that of the most educated of our societies without ceasing to be that of the village."<sup>1</sup>

It was an aloof area, this New England, sufficient unto itself, snobbish perhaps, isolationist--"New England unabsorbed and unreconciled..."<sup>2</sup>. It all splendidly represented his rediscovered America--the Common, Beacon Hill, the Park Street Church, the Boston Museum (then a theatre, lacking the courage to call itself one), the Charles. In this capital of Eastern culture, he began to become fiercely American, as he had never been in his early youth, and began to see nothing but beauty and vigor wherever he looked.

1. Notes of a Son & Brother, Henry James, pp. 351-352

2. *Ibid.*, p. 352





It was while the Jameses were residing at Ashburton Place that Henry received his first earned wage, twelve dollars from the North American Review, then edited by Charles Eliot Norton, for a brief piece of literary criticism. Afternoons at the Norton home in Shady Hill, in the sun-filled library, were among his most cherished memories of New England days. It was at Ashburton Place, too, that the Jameses first received the news of the Lincoln murder, and of the death of Hawthorne. Hawthorne, whose "Wonder-Book" and "Twice-Told Tales" had been among his childhood favorites, was Henry's first proof that an American, writing exclusively about America, to all appearances knowing and caring only about America, could truly be an artist; and it was he whom Henry early tried, unsuccessfully, to imitate.

In 1866 his parents settled, for the rest of their lives, in Cambridge. William was attending the Harvard Medical School, then associated with the Massachusetts General Hospital. There were trips to Swampscott in the summer (the only American "country", save Newport, Henry had ever known), but the rest of the family remained at home, and at last the old urge to cross the sea returned to the young writer. His hunger for Europe, dormant for a little while, was reasserting itself and gradually becoming a gnawing pain, and by 1869 he was able to satisfy it by a return which was to last fifteen months.





Now began a conflict in his heart which was to rage constantly for six uncertain, tormented years, and recur, less violently, throughout the remainder of his life; the war between his undeniable affinity for the Old World and his inherent patriotism and love for the New. In March, 1869, he wrote to his mother:

The truth is that the face of things here throws a sensitive American back on himself--back on his prejudices and national passions, and benumbs for a while the faculty of appreciation and the sense of justice." 1.

But in October of the same year he wrote of his fellow Americans, who apparently felt those same "prejudices and national passions":

There is but one word to use in regard to them--vulgar, vulgar, vulgar. Their ignorance--their stingy, defiant, grudging attitude toward everything European--their perpetual reference of all things to some American standard or precedent which exists only in their own unscrupulous wind-bags--and then our unhappy poverty of voice, of speech and of physiognomy--these things glare at you hideously. On the other hand, we seem a people of character, we seem to have energy, capacity and intellectual stuff in ample measure. What I have pointed at as our vices are the elements of the modern man with culture left out. It's the absolute and incredible lack of culture that strikes you in common travelling Americans...They (the English) have manners and a language. We lack both, but particularly the latter... I have seen some nice Americans and I still love my country." 2.

1. The Letters of Henry James, Percy Lubbock, Ed., Vol. I. p. 19  
2. Ibid., p. 22.





Henry was twenty-six when he wrote those words, and until he was thirty-three he was unable to reconcile his incompatible opinions. He spent those years traveling from the one continent to the other--returning to his native land in June of 1870, crossing again in two years with his sister and aunt, visiting his beloved Italy, when they left after six months, until the Autumn of 1874, when he wrote:

"But pity our poor bare country and don't revile. England and Italy, with their countless helps to life and pleasure, are the lands for happiness and self-oblivion. It would seem that in our great unendowed, unfurnished, unentertained and unentertaining continent, where we all sit sniffing, as it were, the very earth of our foundations, we ought to have leisure to turn out something handsome from the very heart of simple human nature..."<sup>1</sup>.

But Henry James was not the man to do the job, for after an American year in 1874-5, he was drawn, as if by the force of gravity, to the place of which he had written to Howells in 1873:

"What is the meaning of this destiny of desolate exile--this dreary necessity of having month after month to do without our friends for the sake of this arrogant old Europe which so little befriends us?"<sup>2</sup>.

So it was not a happy decision, this final choice between his homeland and the country he finally adopted. There was cowardice and courage in it: the former because, in his

1. The Letters of Henry James, Percy Lubbock, Ed., Vol. I. p. 37

2. Ibid., p. 34.





heart, Henry was afraid of his country, afraid of its vastness, its tremendously growing power, its new, yet-untested strength, its ruggedness, its vigor, its enormous, terrifying potentialities--while Europe represented the world he knew best, a narrow world, perhaps, a world of tried-and-true values, of manners, of proved taste, of culture, whose standards changed, if they changed at all, gradually, almost imperceptibly, a civilized world; the latter because, brilliant and clear-minded as he was, he could anticipate the accusations of unpatriotism, of snobbery, the probable financial loss and injury to his reputation which would (and did) follow, and yet was able to relinquish his home, the friends, the country he loved for what he knew was--inevitably and rightly--his destiny. It was the most important decision he was ever to make--heartbreaking, but tremendous.

In 1882 the occasion of his mother's death brought him back to New England. Despite the sadness of the event, he was happy to be home again; the course of his life now clearly set, he could relax and enjoy his visit to his birthplace. He could bask in the delicious warmth of his native sun undisturbed by nagging doubts, receive the homage of his countrymen ("Daisy Miller," published four years earlier, had won him a measure of popular acclaim), and be impressed by the "extra-





ordinary growing, swarming, glittering, pushing, chattering, good-natured, cosmopolitan"<sup>1</sup>city of New York, comfortable in the knowledge that he would soon return to his "black and horrible and delightful" old London.

And so the years passed. England was now truly his abode, but his old affection and dimly-aching homesickness for America would always persist. He worried over the American outbreak over the question of the Venezuelan frontier--from a distance of three thousand miles he felt the split between the East and the West, a cleavage between what he considered "one civilization and a barbarism."<sup>2</sup> He was deeply concerned about the rife jingoism in the States--the threat of aggression always alarmed him--and the accession of Theodore Roosevelt to the Presidency after the assassination of McKinley in 1901 intensified his fear for the welfare of his country. His continuing love for her was poignantly expressed when, in a letter to Mrs. Cadwalader Jones in 1902, he wrote:

"I kind of make you out, 'down there'  
I mean in the pretty, very pretty, as it used to be, New York Autumn, and in the Washington Squarish region trodden by the steps of my childhood, and I wonder if you ever kick the October leaves as you walk in Fifth Avenue, as I can to this hour feel myself, positively smell myself doing. But perhaps there are no leaves and no trees now in Fifth Avenue--

1. The Letters of Henry James, Percy Lubbock, Ed., Vol. I. p.99  
2. Ibid., p. 243.





nothing but patriotic arches, Astor Hotels, and Vanderbilt palaces..."<sup>1</sup>.

And to William Dean Howells in the same year:

"Your visit to Cambridge makes me yearn a little...Did the ghost of other walks (I'm told Fresh Pond is no longer a Pond, or no longer Fresh, or something) ever brush you with the hem of its soft shroud?"<sup>2</sup>.

His yearning grew, and at last at the age of sixty-one, for the first time in twenty-one years, he again visited the United States. He had by now developed the kind of infatuation with the idea of America that he had had earlier toward Europe, and he began to feel that if he did not grasp the opportunity of once again seeing it, it might never again come. Too, he had long since grown to think of England and America as a "big Anglo-Saxon total," and wished to absorb fresh impressions of his native half of the whole while he was still capable of grasping them clearly. So he did return, but, though prepared by William for the phenomena of change, his land was as strange to him as if he had been British-born. True, the New Hampshire fall, its "golden September weather," held a remembered beauty; New England farm cooking was again a delight to him; New York was still "appalling," and Boston still had "quality and convenience." But the rest of his own country, most of which he now saw for the first time, was indeed a New World.

1. The Letters of Henry James, Percy Lubbock, Ed., Vol. I. P.402
2. Ibid., p. 409



nothing but pathetic groans, wailing, and  
wailing... "I."

and so William Dean Howells in the same year:

"After visits to Cambridge and other  
a little... Did the ghost of other writers (I'm told) visit  
there is no longer a bond, or no longer a bond, or no longer  
thing) ever bring you with the best of its spirit?"

His genuine guest, and at last at the age of sixty-

one, for the first time in twenty-one years, he again visited

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literature, the "golden age of literature," held a remembered

beauty; New England farm doings were again a delight to him;

New York was still "excellent," and Boston still had "quality

and convenience." But the rest of his own country, most of

which he now saw for the first time, was indeed a New World.

His visit to Florida was his first experience in the Tropics, and of it he wrote (to Mrs. W. K. Clifford in 1905):

"...The very south tiptoe of Florida, from which I came three days ago, has an air of molten liquid velvet, and the palm and the orange, the pine-apple, the scarlet hibiscus, the vast magnolia and the sapphire sea, make it a vision of very considerable beguilement..." 1.

Despite that glowing description, perhaps more impressive to him was the venerable age of the city of St. Augustine, and the 16th Century Spanish Fort and tiny old Spanish cathedral front. He cared little for the vastness of the scenery, the myriad hues of the flowers either in Florida or California. He had always, a little shamefacedly, cared infinitely more for rare architectural marbles, and although struck by the raging beauty of acres of color, the fresh oranges and olives, the quiet, comfortable charm of Lamb House did not for a moment forsake him. Particularly in the mighty cities of the Middle West did he long for the mulberry tree in his garden; Chicago was a colossal city by a colossal lake--and seemed to him colossally ugly. The Lenox countryside, seen from the Wharton's automobile, seemed charming and quiet by comparison, but he was glad, after an absence of eleven months, to return to his house at Rye. Of his American tour he wrote to Paul Harvey in 1906:

1. The Letters of Henry James, Percy Lubbock, Ed., Vol. II. p. 30



His visit to Florida was his first experience in the

tropics, and as it was (see letter to Mr. Gifford in 1903):

"...The very south of Florida, from which I came three days ago, has an air of moist, humid relief, and the palm and the orange, the pine-apple, the sugar-cane, the vast banana and the papaya are, more or less, a vision of very considerable development..."

Despite this glowing description, perhaps more impres-

sive to him was the venerable age of the city of St. Augustine.

and the 18th Century Spanish Fort and tiny old Spanish cathedral

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more architectural marvels, and although struck by the varying

beauty of rows of color, the fresh oranges and olives, the

quiet, comfortable rows of lamp houses did not for a moment

for him. Interestingly in the midst of the Middle

West did he find for the midwinter tree in his garden; Chicago

was a colonial city by a colonial lake--and seemed to him col-

lectly ugly. The lower country, seen from the station's

automobile, seemed charming and quiet by comparison, but he

was glad, after an absence of eleven months, to return to his

house at New York. Of his American tour he wrote to Lady Haverley in

1903:

1. The Letters of Henry James, Part I, Vol. II, p. 30

"...I found my native land, after so many years, interesting, formidable, fearsome and fatiguing, and much more difficult to see and deal with in any extended and various way than I had supposed...It is an extraordinary world, an altogether huge 'proposition' as they say there, giving one, I think, an immense impression of material and political power; but almost cruelly charmless, in effect, and calculated to make one crouch, ever afterwards, as cravenly as possible, at Lamb House, Rye--if one happens to have a poor little L.H.,R., to crouch in..."<sup>1</sup>.

Yet, after three more years of absence, he could write to William (in 1909):

"The very smell and sentiment of the American summer's end there and of Alice's beautiful 'rustic' hospitality of overflowing milk and honey, to say nothing of squash pie and ice-cream in heroic proportions, all mingle for me with the assault of forest and lake and of those delicious orchardy, yet rocky vaguenesses and Arcadian 'nowheres' which are the note of what is sweetest and most attaching in the dear old American, or particularly New England, scenery. It comes back to me as with such a magnificent beckoning looseness--in relieving contrast to the consummate tightness (a part, too, oddly, of the very wealth of effect) du pays d'ici." <sup>2</sup>.

It was after the death of William on August twenty-seventh, 1910, Henry James journeyed for the last time to his homeland, where he spent the year 1911. Again the "great and glorious American fact of weather" failed to ameliorate his chronic homesickness for his foggy English home, so he returned to the welcoming privacy of his little Lamb House garden, surrounded protectingly by the crumbling brick wall, never again to see the wild, beautiful, terrifying land of his birth.

1. Letters of Henry James. Percy Lubbock, Ed., Vol. II., p.48.

2. Ibid., p. 135.





But his renunciation of his country was not yet complete, for soon began the series of events which were to terminate in the second great decision in Henry James' career. Or perhaps it was only a delayed extension of the first, for it was a more emphatic restatement of his belief in that civilization which he had long ago sought, and found, across the Atlantic.

The German invasion of Belgium affected him profoundly, for in it, and the atrocities which followed, he foresaw the demolition of the world of taste, of culture, of gentility which he so loved, the abandonment, in short, of idealism to barbarism. He saw the war as a struggle between Good and Evil, and England's part in it as a Holy Crusade. England represented Right; he seemed not to see that the recent history of nationalism, militarism, and imperialism could only end in war, and that guilt must in some measure fall upon each of the participants. Everything he esteemed was in danger of being devoured by a cruel and bloodthirsty enemy, and he felt the debacle as personally as if he had been in the front lines across the channel. The sinkings of neutral ships and American cargo boats--even though the crews were saved--struck him as infamous acts which merited immediate reprisal, and he began to feel a sinking sense of shame that his own country merely protested them, albeit vehemently. He wrote in 1915 to Mrs. William James:



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William James:

"...Mr. Roosevelt is far from dear to me, but I can't not agree with his contention that the U.S.'s sitting down in meekness and silence under the German repudiation of every engagement she solemnly took with us, as the initiatory power in the Hague convention, constitutes an unspeakable precedent, and makes us a deplorable figure." 1.

So at last, in 1915, still many months before the American declaration of war, he took the step which severed his nominal tie with the United States, and became a naturalized British subject. But there was no cowardice in this decision; it was a public affirmation of his belief in a cause, which, right or wrong, the United States had not yet espoused. He was doing what he, a man of seventy-two, could, to fight for civilization.

1. The Letters of Henry James, Percy Lubbock, Ed., Vol. II. p. 449.



"...Mr. Hoover is far from dear to me. But I can't not agree with his contention that the U.S. is sitting down in weakness and silence under the German domination of every important and solemnly took with us, at the initiative power in the same convention, constituted an unparallel precedent, and makes us a formidable figure."

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## CHAPTER V.

### HENRY JAMES'S PLACE IN AMERICAN

### LITERATURE

Henry James was born into the Romantic Period of American literature, a period which extended, roughly, from the War of 1812 to the War for Southern Independence. It was a time when American literature, as well as the American nation, was developing its own characteristics, its own style, a certain individuality independent of foreign influence--was, in short, growing from infancy to adolescence. It remained for his own generation to bring it to maturity.

The romanticism of the time, however, had its roots abroad. While we were emerging from the influence of the Puritans, Europe was, following Rousseau, shaking off the shackles of 18th century classicism. Sentiment held precedence over sense; radicalism withstood reason. Prose authors and poets returned to nature and to the past. Democracy became fashionable; humanitarianism was expressed in the many movements for reform. The doctrine of imitation gave place to the credo of individuality, and idealism supplanted realism. Freedom, mysticism, passion, imagination pervaded the literature of the era, and found their philosophical basis in the Critique of Pure Reason of Immanuel Kant. It was this work which, transmitted to the New World through the writings of Coleridge and Carlyle, formed the



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LITERATURE

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foundation of New England Transcendentalism half a century later.

While Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and Keats wrote poetry, Lamb and Hazlitt essays, and Jane Austen and Sir Walter Scott novels typifying the prevalent romantic outlook in England, across the channel in France, Rousseau and Victor Hugo, and in Germany Schelling, the Schlegel brothers, and above all Goethe were furthering the new philosophy. It was inevitable that it should next cross the Atlantic to the young United States.

When it reached these shores, however, certain of the characteristics of romanticism were modified to suit our unique national life. We had already achieved democracy, for example, so the spirit of radical social revolution was missing from our native prose and poetry. Our writers, like their European contemporaries, succumbed to the lure of the past, but our past was not as distant as theirs; we could go only as far back as Cooper's idealized "noble savage," or Irving's old New York. Poe and Irving tried their hands at Gothic tales, and there were a quantity of plays dealing with the foreign and the long-ago, but our authors were most successful when they dealt with the material at hand--the frontier, the sea of Cooper, Melville, and Dana, and the peculiarly American brand of humor which pervaded every part of our unsophisticated national life. Still we suffered from a sense of artistic inferiority, a feeling that we were "country cousins" to the cultivated Europeans--a national state of mind which the absence of international copyright laws, placing us at a disadvantage beside our English competitors, did nothing to al-



13.

Foundation of New England Transcendentalism held a central place.

While Emerson, Thoreau, Alcott, May, and others wrote poetry, Lamb and Hazlitt wrote, and Jane Austen and Sir Walter Scott novels.

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leviate. Too often sentiment took the place of honest passion; too often surface morality was substituted for human depth; the absence of astute critical opinion encouraged our authors to write to the level of undiscriminating popular taste.

Even our national ideals, formulated at about the middle of the century by the body of idealistic men and women known as the Transcendentalists, had their origin abroad. They were a mixture of Oriental philosophy, the tenets of Rousseau and Fourier, and the German Kant. It was in America, however, that they achieved the unity and coherence which were to be the basis of the first truly American literature-- literature which could unashamedly take its place beside that of the elder civilizations. The intellectual achievements of Emerson and Thoreau, of William Ellery Channing, Bronson Alcott and Margaret Fuller established the cultural supremacy of the East, a tradition nurtured by the accomplishments of Longfellow, Whittier, Holmes, Lowell and Hawthorne. While Dickens, Thackeray, Meredith and George Eliot were writing their novels in England, New England was at last producing worthy rivals to challenge the long-established superiority of the Mother Country.

Then came the War.

The consequences of such a conflict as this cannot be realized until we see them from a distance. The suffering and grief caused by the war itself, the emancipation of the slaves, the political upheaval, the westward expansion, the widespread and rapid industrialization of this agrarian country are a matter of record. These are





the facts. But what did the war and its aftermath do to the thinking of the people? As they changed from naïve, provincial ex-colonists, pioneers, frontiersmen, farmers, to city-dwellers, factory-workers, captains of industry; as they acquired wealth and education; as they traveled, read, bought pictures; what was happening to them inside? Was the innate character of the American people changing, or just their external appearance? The answers to these questions cannot be found in the newspapers of the times, or the magazines, for the reporters and journalists were too close to their contemporaries to be able to be completely detached observers. Still less can they be found in the writings of foreign visitors, who, although sometimes trained, like Dickens, in the ways of human behavior, found it difficult to see beneath the surface; for, like children, we were guilty of "showing off" to conceal our shyness. No, the answers must be found in the American literature of the post-war period, surveyed after a period of years, so that prevalent trends may be discerned, and compared, and weighed; and after this has been done, what do we find? We find that during these years which followed the Civil War--indeed, from 1865 until the next great war in 1914, the American people were becoming mature. They were not changing fundamentally; their qualities of independence, of inventiveness, of native shrewdness and underlying honesty did not diminish. But they were growing up.

The adolescent striving toward maturity is in a difficult po-



The fact that the war and its aftermath led to the changing  
of the people's way of life, particularly in the  
provinces, towns, and cities, and in the  
manner of industry, as they became more and more  
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find? We find that during these years which followed the Civil War--  
indeed, from 1865 until the next great war in 1914, the American people  
were in a state of change. They were not changing fundamentally; their  
qualities of mind and character, of individualism, of active enterprise  
and underlying honesty did not diminish. But they were moving

The following extracts from the report of the  
Commissioner of the Census for 1900 are in a different or-

sition. He perceives the knowledge, the wisdom, the poise of his parents and tries to emulate them, but his youth and lack of experience make his efforts seem ludicrous to the very ones he imitates. So he defies them, cries aloud for independence, for the respect of his elders, and yet is unable to assume the responsibilities which would entitle him to be treated as the man he so earnestly wishes to be. Before his companions he struts and boasts, pretending to knowledge and experience beyond his years, but in the presence of authority he quails again, recognizing, perhaps subconsciously, that he is not yet complete, that there are values still beyond his grasp. So he day-dreams, and in his imagination possesses those qualities of secular sophistication he admires.

But it is when he awakens from his dreams and faces his shortcomings squarely; when he realizes that, whatever his youthful attainments have been, there are qualities he still lacks; when he sees reality unveiled and begins at last to know himself; then he begins to attain adulthood at last.

So it was with the American people, and the record of their emergence is partly to be found in the writings of Henry James. He watched them struggling to come of age; he stood apart and observed their eager attempts to grasp the culture of the old world, their rebuffs at the hands of those they secretly envied, their pathetic efforts to devour at a single sitting the fruits of centuries of foreign tradition. He watched them at home and he watched them abroad,



... He perceived the knowledge, the wisdom, the power of his  
... and tried to realize this, but his youth and lack of experience  
... his efforts were insufficient to the very end as he believed, so  
... this time, this alone for independence, for the respect of his  
... this, but he is unable to assume the responsibilities which would  
... this is to be expected as the man he so earnestly wanted to be.  
... Before his departure he wrote and showed, something, he thought  
... and experience beyond his years, but in the presence of adversity  
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... but it is when he speaks from his dream and faces his short-  
... coming honestly; when he realizes that, whatever his youthful at-  
... tainments have been, there are qualities he still lacks; when he  
... goes really, unswayed and aware of his own himself; when he  
... begins to attain adulthood at last.  
... He is now with his father, people, and the record of their  
... emergency is partly to be found in the writings of Henry James. He  
... without them struggling to come of age, he stood rigid and observed  
... their eager attempts to grasp the culture of the old world, their  
... results at the hands of those they eagerly envied, their pathetic  
... efforts to recover at a single stroke the fruits of generations of  
... former traditions. He watched them at home and he looked from abroad,

and he described them for posterity with understanding and irritation, with sympathy and exasperation, with admiration and pity, and above all with accuracy. For James was a realist.

When, in the middle '60's, James was beginning to contribute to the North American Review and The Atlantic Monthly, a trend toward realism was already observable in American literature.

As before, the new literary movement had begun on the Continent. Balzac had written his *Comédie Humaine*; Gustave Flaubert, the de Goncourts, Daudet, de Maupassant and Zola were extending realism to arch-naturalism, sparing nothing in their "experimental" method of depicting life as it is. From Germany, where the Communist Manifesto had been published in 1847, the philosophies of Hegel, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche crossed the channel and were read by Carlyle and George Eliot (who was to have her own influence on James), and later by Hardy, Gissing and G. B. Shaw. The Russian trio, Tolstoi, Turgenieff and Dostoevski, extended the realistic beginnings made by Nikolai Gogol. England, where the prevailing morality of the Victorian Age gave much of its literature a didactic tone, contributed Darwin's Origin of the Species in 1859, which, promulgated by Huxley, began to infuse a spirit of doubt and criticism into complacent English minds.

In America at the end of the war the Machine Age and its consequences, pessimistically anticipated by Rousseau, were undermining the idealistic romanticism of the early decades of the century; the triumph of democracy was heralded by Walt Whitman; tales of the frontier seeped into Boston, the stronghold of the "genteel tradition";





a native American drama was developing; with the growth of transportation and communication systems, nationalism was replacing sectionalism; and in 1865, the United States Consul in Vienna returned to this country and joined the staff of the New York Nation.

His name was William Dean Howells, and his importance in American letters can hardly be over-emphasized. In his own novels, sketches and plays he typifies the right-wing realism of the last half of the century, conservative, provincial, selective, limited by the standards of his own environment. As an editor and critic, he influenced and encouraged such diverse authors as Mark Twain, Hamlin Garland, Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Booth Tarkington, and his good friend Henry James. Although as an inheritor of the strict morality and sentiment of his Puritan ancestors he failed to delve deeply into the motives of his characters, he was an accurate reporter and a sincere advocate of truth. As James himself said of him, in a letter to Charles Eliot Norton in 1871:

"Howells edits, and observes and produces--the latter in his own particular line with more and more perfection. His recent sketches in the Atlantic, collected into a volume, belong, I think, to very good literature. He seems to have resolved himself, however, into one who can write solely of what his fleshly eyes have seen; and for this reason I wish he were 'located' where they would rest upon richer and fairer things than this immediate landscape. Looking about for myself, I conclude that the face of nature and civilization in this our country is to a certain point a very sufficient literary field. But it will yield its secrets only to a really grasping imagination. This I think Howells lacks. (Of course I don't ! ) To write well and worthily of American things one need even more than elsewhere to be a master. But unfortunately one is less !" \*

Lubbock: The Letters of Henry James, Vol I, p. 30-31.



...in the American drama and development with the growth of the...  
...and communication agencies, especially in the...  
...and in 1900, the United States Consul in Vienna returned to this...  
...country, and joined the staff of the New York Herald.

His name was William Dean Howells, and his reputation as a...  
...and his work as a writer. In his own words, Howells...  
...and they in it, like the right-wing faction of the late part of the...  
...country, conservative, provincial, exclusive, limited in the standards...  
...of his own environment. As an editor and critic, he influenced and...  
...suggested such diverse authors as W. D. Howells, William Dean Howells, Henry James, George...  
...Gore, Frank Norris, Joseph Conrad, and his good friend Henry James.

Although an admirer of the strict accuracy and...  
...his criticism, Howells himself was a...  
...his characters, he was an accurate reporter and a...  
...of them. As James himself said of him, in a letter to...  
...in 1891:

"Howells critic, and observer and producer—the latter in his own...  
...particular form with more and more perfection. His...  
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...and I... He seems to have received himself, however, into...  
...and the... of... and his... eyes have... and for...  
...this reason I was not 'fascinated' when they would read upon...  
...and other things than this immediate landscape. Looking...  
...I can see that the... of nature and civilization in this...  
...our country is no... a... very...  
...but it will yield its secrets only to a... from...  
...into I believe Howells' house. (Of course I don't!) To write well and...  
...richly of nature's things and how they are... to be...  
...a... but unfortunately one is late!"

Although it was his friendship with Howells which launched him as a contributor to the Nation and the Atlantic, and encouraged him in later years when his popular appeal was small, James's literary beginnings were based on other models. He began as an imitator of the great Nathaniel Hawthorne, whose Twice-Told Tales had been part of his childhood reading fare. It was the fact that Hawthorne, almost alone in his time, dealt with the inner problems of human beings, which made him appeal to young Henry's probing mind, but more importantly it was his ability to blend his characters, his plot and action, his descriptions and his underlying theme into a single unified impression, for here he fulfilled one of James's major tenets, expressed in his The Art of Fiction, that a novel, despite its length and multitude of component parts, should be an "organic whole."

The combination of imagination and objectivity which he found in Honoré Balzac, whose writings had been introduced to him by the conversations of John La Farge, also had its impact on James, although the sheer size and variety of the Comédie Humaine, beginning as it did the realistic trend in France, might account for its profound influence throughout the Western world. It is possible that it was the touch of mysticism, of romance which attracted James, for it was these qualities which were missing from the naturalists of the next generation, whose "ferocious pessimism" and "handling of unclean things" \* repelled James.

\* Lubbock: The Letters of Henry James. Vol.I. Letter to Howells, 1884, p.105



Although it was his friendship with Hawthorne which launched him as a contributor to the Atlantic and the Atlantic, and encouraged him in those years when his regular salary was small, James's literary beginnings were made on other fields. He began as an imitator of the great Victorian novelists, whose Twice-Told Tales had been part of his childhood reading fare. It was the first time Hawthorne, almost alone in his time, dealt with the inner recesses of human beings, which made him appeal to young Henry's probing mind, but more important, it was his ability to blend his characters, his plot and setting, his understatement and his underlying themes into a single unified expression, for here he exhibited one of James's "art-forms", expressed in his Art of Fiction, that a novel, despite its length and multitude of component parts, should be an "organic whole".

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He respected the honesty of these left-wing realists, their intelligence and their courage. Too, he believed that "the air of reality" was "the supreme virtue of a novel." \* But James was an artist, and as such felt that selection was an important part of composition, although selection must be both typical and inclusive. He believed in taking notes, many notes, from which to choose a few to be developed. Form mattered to him, nearly as much as fact, and he could not feel, with the experimentalists, that a novel should be a sociological case-study--indeed, not fiction at all.

Thackeray, George Eliot, Turgenieff, all played their parts in James's conception of what the novel should be. He learned from them, their contemporaries, and their predecessors; he read and absorbed the contributions of the world's best thinkers and story-tellers. Yet he was intensely original; his acute observation, profound perception and native intellectuality enabled him to surpass his former masters, and at last bring the American novel to the level of a true art form.

Of what did this art consist? What made his contribution different from that of his contemporaries, and in many ways unique? Why has his popularity grown steadily greater in the years since his death, while that of many of his own generation of writers, acclaimed in their own time, has declined?

First, his "realism" was a happy medium between the stark, clinical, unabashed reporting of the French naturalists and the somewhat timid,

\* Henry James: The Art of Fiction. Reproduced in The James Family: F. O. Matthiessen. New York, Alfred A. Knopf. 1947. P. 360.



He regarded the history of these last-mentioned writers, their intelligence and their courage. Too, he believed that "the art of writing" was "the supreme virtue of a novel." The James was an artist, and as much that their selection was an important part of his collection, his thought selection must be both typical and inclusive. He believed in lasting value, many noted, it is which to choose a way to be developed. For matters to him, nearly as much as fact, and he would not feel with the experimentalists, that a novel should be a "novelistic" case-study--indeed, not fiction at all.

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Of what did this art consist? What made his contribution different from that of his contemporaries, and in many ways unique? He was a man of letters, a writer in the best sense of the word, while that of many of his own generation of writers, occupied in their own time, was technical. First, his "realism" was a happy medium between the stark, clinical, unadorned reporting of the French naturalists and the somewhat ideal,

prettified, narrow approach of Howells. He said, "The only reason for the existence of a novel is that it does attempt to represent life," \* yet he realized that fiction, no matter how truthful, cannot be life. He knew that a story must be make-believe, yet he believed that "...the air of reality (solidity of specification) seems...to be the supreme virtue of a novel--the merit on which all its other merits...help-<sup>1.</sup> lessly and submissively depend." The "air of reality" his works certainly had, and more; as a psychologist he was able to probe into the hearts and minds of human beings, and thereby achieve a profundity beyond the scope of the experimental novelists. Inner truth seemed to him more important--indeed, more real--than material facts.

Moreover, he brought into the realistic literary atmosphere an element which Édouard Manet had already introduced to painting-- a theory called Impressionism.

Webster's New International Dictionary defines the idea underlying the practice of impressionism as "the necessity of rendering the immediate sense impression of the artist, apart from any analysis or any study of the characteristics in the objects represented, other than their external appearance." It follows that in literature, it would mean "the depiction of scene, emotion or character with broad simplicity and little attention to detail." In other words, the end of art, in either form, is the "rendering of immediate subjective impressions."

\* Op. cit., p. 354.

1. Ibid., p. 360.





According to this definition, James was not an impressionist, any more than he was an experimentalist because he used elements of naturalism in his writing. He simply utilized those aspects of impressionism which contributed to his artistic purpose, and modified them to suit his needs. He was extremely impressionable (if that word can be used without connoting naïveté), and hyper-sensitive, as we have seen. It is probably safe to say that all of his fiction sprang from his intense impressions. Too, he fulfilled the end of art, as decreed by the impressionistic school. But it is unlikely that the words "broad simplicity and little attention to detail" will ever be applied to the writings of Henry James. His work is complicated, filled with detail, with careful and minute analyses, and deep wisdom.

One or two examples of his method will illustrate how far his impressionism went, and where it stopped.

The Aspern Papers, one of his finest short novels, concerns a young man's efforts to uncover some unpublished letters, the "literary remains" of the famous American poet, Jeffrey Aspern, jealously preserved in Venice by his now-aged mistress, Juliana. Posing as a disinterested lodger, he tries to reach the old lady's secret through her plain, dull niece, Miss Tina, only to meet with tacit disapproval of his prying from both. At last, upon the death of the once-beautiful Juliana, the precious letters are burned, one by one, by her uncompromisingly honest niece.

The germ of the story was a report James heard from John Sargent in Florence, that Jane Clairmont, mother of Byron's daughter Allegra,





was still alive there. He also heard that an "ardent Shelleyite," a Captain Silsbee from Salem, had entered her house as a boarder to try to find some written remnants of the romantic poets.

James, believing that "the minimum of valid suggestion serves the man of imagination better than the maximum," \* waited to hear no more. The rumor was enough to set his creative energies in motion. He moved the scene of the drama from Florence to Venice; he transformed Byron into the American Jeffrey Aspern; he invented Miss Tina, a pivotal character in the novelette; he dealt searchingly and compellingly with the problem of artistic "rights" pitted against human decency. Yet he leaves the reader with the feeling that he has captured something of the old romantic atmosphere, that he has seen "the final scene of the dim Shelley drama...in the very theatre of our modernity." \*

His famous tale of immeasurable and unspeakable horror, The Turn of the Screw, serves even better as an illustration of his ability to convey an impression he himself has once received, for here his avowed purpose was "to make the reader's general vision intense."<sup>1</sup> He had heard a story of the ghosts of some wicked servants who returned to 'get hold' of the two small children of the household, and from this fragment created one of the greatest tales of mystery and evil--a combination of the supernatural and an obscure sensuality--in world literature.

\*Quoted by Philip Rahv, ed., The Great Short Novels of Henry James New York. Dial Press Inc. 1944., p. 466

1. Ibid., p. 625.





But while he only hints at the morbidity of the spirits' designs, the story is far from simple; it is actually a study in abnormal psychology. Every action, every brief conversation or bit of description suggests terrifying possibilities beneath the surface of the episode. James was infinitely thorough; he had a solid understanding of his material before he presented it, but he did not draw diagrams for his reader. As he said of this story:

"What, in the last analysis, had I to give the sense of? Of their being, the haunting pair, capable, as the phrase is, of everything--that is of exerting, in respect to the children, the very worst action: small victims so conditioned might be conceived as subject to... Only make the reader's general vision intense, I said to myself...and his own experience, his own imagination...will supply him quite sufficiently with all the particulars. Make him think the evil, make him think it for himself..." \*

Thus James received an impression, let his imagination dwell upon it, explored its possibilities, amplified and developed it, molded it as a sculptor molds clay, and at last succeeded in rendering his "immediate subjective impression." So far, then, was James an impressionist.

In James's writings, then, we find a blend of those elements of realism and impressionism which time has shown to be enduring, coupled with an innate knowledge of modern psychology. These qualities can, however, be found in varying degrees in other authors of his day, whose novels still lacked artistic merit. James's critical ability enabled him to elevate his mature work to the level of true art.

\*Loc. cit.





In The Art of Fiction James discusses the importance of criticism to art when he says:

"Art lives upon discussion, upon experiment, upon curiosity, upon variety of attempt, upon the exchange of views and the comparison of standpoints...The successful application of any art is a delightful spectacle, but the theory too is interesting; and though there is a great deal of the latter without the former I suspect there has never been a genuine success that has not had a latent core of conviction. Discussion, suggestion, formulation, these things are fertilising when they are frank and sincere."

Yet it must be remembered that there was no formal criticism of the novel until the time of James's own generation. Until then, even during the literary reign of Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot and Meredith, the writing of fiction was not classed with painting, poetry, architecture or music as an art form. There was abroad, as James expressed it, the "comfortable, good-humored feeling...that a novel is a novel, as a pudding is a pudding, and that our only business with it could be to swallow it." \*

Even the novelists themselves did not take their medium too seriously, but instead used it as a vehicle for transmitting moral propaganda. They crusaded for reform through their stories, and if they dwelt searchingly upon the problem of sin, they were equally concerned with its wages. This didactic attitude prevailed in America from The Scarlet Letter through Uncle Tom's Cabin and Howells's A Modern Instance; and in England from Pamela: or, Virtue Rewarded through Oliver Twist. The same purposeful manner can even be found in the pessimism of Zola and his clique.

Even worse, some of them were likely to take the reader into

\* Op. cit., Matthiessen, The James Family, p. 354.





their confidence in an aside and cheerfully admit that what was being related was, after all, just a story, and neither author nor reader need take it too seriously. Fielding was guilty of this in the great Tom Jones. Trollope actually offered to alter his tales to conform to his public's desires. This practice struck James as a "betrayal of a sacred office,"\*as execrable in Trollope as it would be in the historians Gibbon or Macauley.

He believed that one could no more write a moral novel than paint a moral picture; that "questions of art are questions (in the widest sense) of execution; questions of morality are quite another affair."<sup>1.</sup> He demanded only that a novel be sincere, but even this he qualified with the statement:

"There is one point at which the moral sense and the artistic sense lie very near together; that is in the light of the very obvious truth that the deepest quality of a work of art will always be the quality of the mind of the producer. In proportion as that intelligence is fine will the novel, the picture, the statue partake of the substance of beauty and truth. To be constituted of such elements is, to my vision, to have purpose enough. No good novel will ever proceed from a superficial mind; that seems to me an axiom which, for the artist in fiction, will cover all needful moral ground; if the youthful aspirant take it to heart it will illuminate for him many of the mysteries of 'purpose.'" <sup>2.</sup>

One need only read The Portrait of a Lady, written three years earlier, in 1881, to find James's theories of the art of fiction exemplified. In this novel he had brought his particular style to maturity, but had not yet developed the preoccupation with form

\*Ibid., p. 355

1. Ibid., p.368

2. Ibid., p.369





which Matthiessen terms his "major phase." Dealing with an American girl, Isabel Archer, traveling in Europe in search of that indefinable thing called "culture," it typifies the subject matter which recurs in different forms throughout James's work, the characterization through subtle conversation and inevitable ratiocination. His heroine is charming, naïve, inquisitive, and, unlike her predecessor Daisy Miller, intelligent. In Europe she finds those relics of antiquity which her homeland lacks, but pays the price of her innocence when she marries the decadent Gilbert Osmond. The novel is a study of the exploitation of a young girl's inexperience by avaricious and cynical worldlings, and her growth into a resigned, disillusioned woman who yet manages to retain her native dignity. Each incident, no matter how apparently slight, each fragment of conversation and description of gesture, the relationships between individual characters contribute to the portrait of the lady; the novel is "a living thing, all one and continuous...and in each of the parts there is something of each of the other parts." \*

James has been called a "realist" and an "impressionist," but he has rarely been termed a "romanticist." Admittedly this would not be an adequate description of the man, as we have seen; but the romanticism in his novels must not be ignored, for it is as pervasive, as inescapable, as are his theories of artistic form.

But "idealism" is an antonym of "realism," and is one of the outstanding attributes of "romanticism." Furthermore, the term

\*Ibid., p. 361





"romantic" is, in literary parlance, commonly contrasted with "realistic." Can we, then, call James a "romantic realist"?

Henry James did not expect life to offer perfection; he saw things as they were, not as they should be. And we have seen that in his conformance to truth--that "true truth"\* which his father had instilled in him, and which had little to do with "facts"--he was a realist.

Yet, as a man of imagination, he was a "seeker after beauty." It was, in fact, his search for beauty which led him to Europe, and we have only to glance at his reminiscences of his early travels, written in his seventieth year, to see that Europe was, to him, the embodiment of romance.

Note this passage from A Small Boy and Others:

"...My contemplative rest at the ancient inn, with all the voices and graces of the past, of the court, of the French scheme of manners in general and of ancient inns, had prepared me not a little...for what was meant by the vie de province--that expression which was to become later on so toned, as old fine colour and old fine opinion are toned. It was the romance of travel, and it was the suggested romance, flushed with suppositions and echoes, with implications and memories, memories of one's 'reading,' which bristled with every kind of contradiction of common experience." 1.

In this single excerpt we find several romantic elements; vivid imagination, a love of the past, the foreign, the unknown, the mysterious. Who will deny, then, that Henry James was that apparent paradox, a "romantic realist"?

Still we must subject him to the ultimate critical test, that

\* Op. cit., James: p. 220.

1. Ibid. p. 282





of "liking" his art. He himself said that before we judge an artist we must say to him:

"Oh, I grant you your starting-point, because if I did not I should seem to prescribe to you, and heaven forbid I should take that responsibility. If I pretend to tell you what you must not take, you will call upon me to tell you then what you must take; in which case I shall be prettily caught. Moreover, it isn't till I have accepted your data that I can begin to measure you. I have the standard, the pitch; I have no right to tamper with your flute and then criticise your music. Of course I may not care for your idea at all; I may think it is silly, or stale, or unclean; in which case I wash my hands of you altogether. I may content myself with believing that you will not have succeeded in being interesting, but I shall, of course, not attempt to demonstrate it, and you will be as indifferent to me as I am to you. I needn't remind you that there are all sorts of tastes: who can know it better? Some people, for excellent reasons, don't like to read about carpenters; others, for reasons even better, don't like to read about courtesans. Many object to Americans. Others (I believe they are mainly editors and publishers) won't look at Italians. Some readers don't like quiet subjects; others don't like bustling ones. Some enjoy a complete illusion, others the consciousness of large concessions. They choose their novels accordingly, and if they don't care about your idea they won't, a fortiori, care about your treatment." \*

To grant James his "starting point" (as Van Wyck Brooks did not) we must accept him as an expatriate, a difficult thing for an American to do. But we must realize his motives for leaving his country, and those things of the spirit for which he longed. In 1880 he wrote to Howells:

"I sympathize even less with your protest against the idea that it takes an old civilization to set a novelist in motion--a proposition that seems to me so true as to be a truism. It is on manners, customs, usages, habits, forms, upon all these things matured and established, that a novelist lives--they are the very stuff his work is made of; and in saying that in the absence of those 'dreary and worn-out paraphernalia' which I enumerate as being wanting in American society, 'we have simply the whole of human life left,' you beg (to my sense) the question. I should say we had just so much less of it as these same 'paraphernalia' represent, and I think they represent an enor-

\*Op. cit., Matthiessen, p. 363-364





mous quantity of it. I shall feel refuted only when we have produced (setting the present high company--yourself and me--for obvious reasons apart) a gentleman who strikes me as a novelist--as belonging to the company of Balzac and Thackeray." \*

These "dreary and worn-out paraphernalia" were to him the breath of life; and we must accept them if we are to accept his "starting point."

If we assume his data, we must assume the fact of the cultural immaturity of the majority of Americans at the time in which he lived, and recognize that his own family background was one of worldly experience and intellectual achievement. We must acknowledge that we as a nation were young and provincial, that we made mistakes, and ask ourselves if we can censure James for seeing and regretting them. And we must admit, in fairness, that "his quarrel with his native land was a lover's quarrel,"<sup>1.</sup> and that his absence from it made him realize<sup>2.</sup> his deep tenderness for his home. Indeed, his treatment of Europeans is frequently harsher than that he metes out to his compatriots; he almost invariably grants moral superiority to his countrymen.

Then, once we accept his "idea," do we find it "silly, or stale, or unclean"? Are keen observation, accurate analysis of human nature--and for these we must give him credit--any of these things?

And last, do we find him "interesting"? If we can reply in the affirmative, the works of Henry James offer unlimited rewards.

\* Op.cit. Lubbock, Vol. I. pp. 72-73.

1. Op.cit., Rahv, Intro. p. viii.

2. For example; Mr. Giovanelli in Daisy Miller; the Bellegardes in The American; Colonel Capadose in The Liar; Richard de Mauves in Madame de Mauves.





# ABSTRACT

A great deal of scholarly material has already been written on special aspects of the work of Henry James. A definitive biography is missing, but because he was a man of thought rather than action, only he himself was capable of writing that. Is there, then, any necessity for "An Introduction to Henry James"?

Although the acclaim he has received from fellow-authors, scholars and critics attests to his stature as a great novelist, Henry James has never been a "popular" writer. He has been considered "difficult," preoccupied with form, and limited in subject matter. And what casual reader of a James novel will turn to the many authoritative works on James to increase his understanding and appreciation of the book? Yet some knowledge of James's world, his life, his mind and the literature of his time is necessary if the reader is to enjoy his works.

The Civil War was the great event of the century into which James was born in 1843. Although he was not a participant in the struggle, James could not escape its effects--the rapid industrialization of his country, the westward expansion, the amassing of huge fortunes, and





the appearance of a new class in America. This "society," the newly rich, and their groping search for the culture which their native land did not provide, provided much of James's subject matter.

James's family and education had given him the cultural atmosphere which the majority of his countrymen lacked. Henry James Sr. was a scholar, a philosopher and a man of means, and believed in a sensuous, rather than a practical, education for his sons. Caring always for virtue rather than success, he sent them from school to school, from country to country, permitting them the freedom to educate themselves by absorbing a variety of impressions and experiences.

It was when he was only two that Henry received his first "sense of Europe," a sense which was to be strengthened by his contacts with Europeans here, and reinforced by his youthful European travels. It was a sense encouraged by his reading and by his education abroad, and it was never diminished except when, after he had made his permanent home at Lamb House, Rye, he had infrequent spells of homesickness. It was in Europe that he was able to find the ancient, established civilization which, he felt, enabled a novelist to thrive: manners, customs, habits, forms--those very qualities which were lacking in his own vigorous, expanding, immature United States.





It was the contrast between age and youth, between experience and innocence, which was James's chief subject matter. How did he manipulate his material in order to raise it to the level of true art?

Before the time of his own generation the novel had not been considered an art form, in a class with poetry, music or painting. Even its practitioners had not taken it seriously, but frequently used it as a vehicle for moral propaganda. Too, the absence of competent criticism, and, in America, of copyright laws, encouraged novelists to write to the level of uneducated popular taste.

The literary movements in America--the Romanticism of the period between the War of 1812 and the Civil War, mid-century Transcendentalism, and the Realism which began to be felt about 1865, were adapted from trends which had begun abroad.

The artistry of Henry James stems from his ability to criticize the literature of the past and of his contemporaries, and select those aspects of it which suited his purpose; imagination and mysticism from the Romantics, and realistic observation from the Naturalists coupled with the subjectivity of Impressionism.

The anomaly of Henry James is that one cannot know James until one has read his works, yet cannot appreciatively read his works unless he is familiar with James himself.





Undoubtedly a genius and a man of enormous influence in the world of letters, he offers too much to even the casual reader to go unread. The purpose of this thesis is to provide an introduction to Henry James which will help the reader to approach James in a more receptive frame of mind, and assist him to find the personal meaning that James can have for every individual.





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